

SERMONS
FOR
THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

BY THE LATE
REV. JOHN KEBLE,
AUTHOR OF "THE CHRISTIAN YEAR."

SOLD BY
JAMES PARKER AND CO. OXFORD,
AND 377, STRAND, LONDON.

1875.



S E R M O N S

FOR

ADVENT

TO

CHRISTMAS EVE

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CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

THE SOLEMN PROCESSION.

S. LUKE xix. 37, 38.

“When He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice, . . . saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the Name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.” pp. 1—13.

SERMON II.

THE ATTENDANTS ON THE JUDGE.

ZECH. xiv. 5.

“The Lord my God shall come and all the Saints with Thee.” pp. 14—24.

SERMON III.

THE GREAT ASSIZE.

DAN. vii. 10.

“The Judgement was set, and the Books were opened.”
pp. 25—35.

SERMON IV.

THE AWFUL RECKONING.

REV. XX. 12.

*"The dead were judged out of those things which were written
in the Books, according to their works."* pp. 36—46.

SERMON V.

THE BOOK OF LIFE.

REV. XX. 12.

"Another Book was opened, which is the Book of Life."
pp. 47—57.

SERMON VI.

MERCY AND JUDGEMENT.

2 S. PET. iii. 8.

*"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a
thousand years as one day."* pp. 58—67.

SERMON VII.

ONCE FOR ALL.

HEB. ix. 27.

*"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the
judgement."* pp. 68—78.

SERMON VIII.

THE END OF ALL THINGS.

EZEK. vii. 2, 3.

“Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send Mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways.”

pp. 79—89.

SERMON IX.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. I.

THE RESURRECTION, ALL MIRACLES IN ONE.

ISA. xxxv. 5, 6.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”

pp. 90—98.

SERMON X.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. II.

ALL THE SOULS OF MEN.

REV. xx. 12, 13.

*“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God :
 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ;
 and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in
 them.”* pp. 99—107.

SERMON XI.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. III.

THE GOOD ANGELS.

S. MATT. xvi. 27.

"The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels." . . . pp. 108—116.

SERMON XII.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. IV.

THE FACE OF GOD.

JOB xix. 26, 27.

"In my flesh shall I see God : Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me." . . . pp. 117—122.

SERMON XIII.

CONSCIENCE, AN EARNEST OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT.

1 S. JOHN iii. 20.

"If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." . . . pp. 123—137.

SERMON XIV.

USE TO BE MADE OF MISGIVINGS OF CONSCIENCE.

1 S. JOHN iii. 20.

"If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." . . . pp. 137—150.

SERMON XV.

CONSOLATIONS OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

1 S. JOHN iii. 21.

"Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." . . . pp. 151—163.

SERMON XVI.

EACH HIS OWN JUDGE, AND NOT ANOTHER'S.

ROM. xiv. 12.

"So then every man must give account of himself to God." pp. 164—174.

SERMON XVII.

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB.

REV. vi. 16, 17.

"Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" pp. 175—186.

SERMON XVIII.

OUR LORD'S HEALING TOUCH.

S. LUKE vi. 19.

"The whole multitude sought to touch Him, for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all." pp. 187—197.

SERMON XIX.

GOD'S LONGSUFFERING A CALL TO REPENTANCE. I.
HIS LONGSUFFERING WITH THE WORLD,
AND THE CHURCH.

2 S. PET. iii. 15.

"Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation."
pp. 198—208.

SERMON XX.

GOD'S LONGSUFFERING A CALL TO REPENTANCE. II.
HIS LONGSUFFERING WITH ALL SOULS OF MEN.

2 S. PET. iii. 15.

"Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation."
pp. 209—218.

SERMON XXI.

GOD'S LONGSUFFERING A CALL TO REPENTANCE. III.
HIS LONGSUFFERING WITH EACH SEPARATE SOUL.

2 S. PET. iii. 15.

"Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation."
pp. 219—227.

SERMON XXII.

WATCHING FOR THE UNKNOWN DAY.

S. MARK xiii. 33.

*"Take ye heed, watch and pray : for ye know not when the
time is."* pp. 228—238.

SERMON XXIII.

THE LIGHTNING-LIKE COMING.

S. MATT. xxiv. 27.

"As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." pp. 239—248.

SERMON XXIV.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS. I.

THE WARNING CALL.

ROM. xiii. 12.

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." pp. 249—256.

SERMON XXV.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS. II.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

PS. cxix. 105.

"Thy word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths." pp. 257—264.

SERMON XXVI.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS. III.

THE MINISTRY.

S. MATT. xxii. 3.

"He sent His servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding." pp. 265—271.

SERMON XXVII.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS. IV.

THE CRY FOR HELP.

S. MATT. viii. 25.

*"His disciples came unto Him, and awoke Him, saying,
Lord, save us : we perish."* . . . pp. 272—278.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE BRINGING DOWN AND THE LIFTING UP OF THE
DAY OF JUDGEMENT.

ISA. ii. 11.

"The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." . . . pp. 279—289.

SERMON XXIX.

THE WINNOWING AND THE BURNING.

S. MATT. iii. 12.

"Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner ; but He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire." pp. 290—299.

SERMON XXX.

THE SOUL'S WELCOME OF CHRIST A TEST OF ITS
SPIRITUAL CONDITION.

S. LUKE xxi. 28.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh."
pp. 300—311.

SERMON XXXI.

THE WONDERS OF GOD'S LAW.

Ps. cxix. 18.

*"Open Thou mine eyes that I may see the wondrous things
of Thy law."* pp. 312—320.

SERMON XXXII.

PRAYER FOR WISDOM.

S. JAMES i. 5, 6.

*"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to
all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given
him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."*
pp. 321—331.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD. I.

ITS NATURE AND OFFICE.

ISA. lxvi. 21.

*"I will also take of them for Priests, and for Levites, saith
the Lord."* pp. 332—340.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD. II.

MUTUAL DUTIES OF PRIEST AND PEOPLE.

MAL. ii. 7.

*"The Priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should
seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the
Lord of Hosts."* pp. 341—351.

SERMON XXXV.

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD. III.
FINAL MEETING OF PRIEST AND PEOPLE.

COL. i. 28.

“That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”
pp. 352—361.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS.

S. MATT. xi. 6.

“Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.”
pp. 362—372.

SERMON XXXVII.

OUR LORD AMONG US, THOUGH WE KNOW HIM NOT.

S. JOHN i. 26.

“There standeth One among you Whom ye know not.”
pp. 373—381.

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE GUIDING VOICE.

ISA. xxx. 21.

“Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying ; This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” . . . pp. 382—390.

SERMON XXXIX.

THE COMING OF OUR LORD, A MOTIVE FOR
CHRISTIAN GENTLENESS.

PHIL. iv. 5.

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." pp. 391—400.

SERMON XL.

THE SYMPATHY OF CHRIST OUR COMFORT IN
DISAPPOINTMENT.

ISA. xlix. 4.

"Then I said, I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain; yet surely my judgement is with the Lord, and my work with my God."
pp. 401—413.

SERMON XLI.

HOW WE HAVE HINDERED OURSELVES.

ISA. xlviii. 18.

"O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." pp. 414—423.

SERMON XLII.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM. I.
DEEP AND TRUE REPENTANCE.

ISA. i. 16, 17.

"Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes: cease to do evil; learn to do well."
pp. 424—434.

SERMON XLIII.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM. II.
WATCHFULNESS, PRAYER, SELF-CHASTISEMENT, ALMS.

ISA. i. 16, 17.

*“Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings
from before Mine eyes : cease to do evil ; learn to do well.”*
pp. 435—445.

SERMON XLIV.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM. III.
WORKS OF MERCY AND FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

ISA. i. 16, 17.

*“Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings
from before Mine eyes : cease to do evil ; learn to do well.”*
pp. 446—457.

SERMON XLV.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM. IV.
CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION.

1 COR. xi. 31, 32.

*“If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged ; but
when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we
should not be condemned with the world.”* pp. 458—468.

SERMON XLVI.

THE HOLY COMMUNION A PERPETUAL WITNESS OF
THE LORD'S RETURN.

1 COR. xi. 26.

*“As often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do
shew the Lord's Death till He come.”* pp. 469—479.

SERMON I.

THE SOLEMN PROCESSION.

S. LUKE xix. 37, 38.

“When He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice, . . . saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the Name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.”

You may easily judge for yourselves my brethren, whether I speak truth when I say, that no parts of the solemn service which the Church teaches us to pay to God, are more apt to take up our minds, and make a deep impression upon us, than those which are appointed to be said in a sort of Procession, that is, while the Minister or People, or both, are moving slowly on for the performance of some holy duty. We have in our Church two or three such Services. At the Burial of the Dead, you know, the Priest meets the people with the coffin at the entrance of the Church yard, and as he turns round and takes the first step, leading the way into the Church, you know with what comfortable words the mournful silence is appointed to be broken: “I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord:” and how,

as we slowly move on, our steps are, as it were, timed to other words of heavenly refreshment, till we have brought our dead under the shelter of God's roof. I suppose that all persons feel more or less the great solemnity of this service, the more for its being solemnised whilst people are moving on.

So again when a Church or Churchyard is consecrated, we have as you know a Processional service appointed. The Bishop and Clergy, it is directed, shall pass up and down the Church, or round the Churchyard, saying or chanting certain appropriate Psalms. I am quite sure that all thoughtful persons who have ever witnessed those most affecting ceremonies, must have felt how they sink into the mind: teaching us, among other things, that the Lord is with us, not only while we are at rest in holy places, but also in our going out and our coming in, and wherever we are moving about the world, to bless what we undertake in His Name, and to help us to serve Him the better and not the worse, for the earthly things that are about us.

If we take this thought along with us, that solemn processions, moving orderly forward with Psalms or Hymns or measured sentences, have always been and are now a very edifying and delightful part of the public worship of God in His Church; we shall perhaps the better understand the history related in the Gospel of this day: how our Lord, the first day of the great and holy week of His Passion, entered into Jerusalem riding on an ass, His disciples around Him, a multitude before and behind Him, bearing branches of palm trees, and uttering with a loud voice a short Hymn taken from the Psalm cxviii:

“Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord: peace in Heaven, and glory in the highest: blessed is the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the Name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” They were used to the words of the Psalm in the Temple service, no doubt with their proper melody: so that we may well believe that they did not only repeat but chant them. And they broke out into that joyful chant at a particular moment in our Lord’s progress, viz. just as He and they came in sight of Jerusalem, now at the descent of the Mount of Olives. And our Lord approved of it, for when the Pharisees came and complained saying, “Master, rebuke Thy disciples,” He answered, “I tell you, that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.”

Nothing surely could be more noble and beautiful than this: nothing more apt to draw the notice of simple persons then and there present, and to be remembered by them long after: as we read that the children took it up, and went on crying or chanting Hosanna, in the Temple, to the great displeasure of the Chief Priests and Scribes. But Scripture teaches, that there was far more in it than a noble and beautiful sight. That solemn procession of the disciples with the people towards Jerusalem was a sign and a figure of Christ with His Church, passing through this world to the perfection of His glorious Kingdom: and the joy and Hosannas of the disciples represent the dutiful thanksgiving of all good Christians waiting on Him all the way.

Let us, by way of Advent meditation, consider the circumstances of this day’s Gospel in this especial

manner, and see what we can learn from it of our privileges and duties as Christians, waiting on our Lord in His Church, until He shall be fully revealed. His entering Jerusalem in a kind of royal procession, was no doubt intended to be a type and figure of our Lord's coming among us, as our Heavenly King, to take to Him His great power and to reign. This, S. John himself tells us: "much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the Name of the Lord. And Jesus when He had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion; behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt." His entering into Jerusalem on an ass was the very token, by which the Holy Spirit had marked Him out beforehand as the promised King of the Jews. He was to be such a King, as should prevail, not by force of arms, as David and others; otherwise He would have ridden, as great warriors are used to do, on horseback. But because He was to be such a King as should execute judgement and justice on the earth, and defend the cause of the poor and needy, therefore He rode on an ass, as peaceful kings, and judges of the people were accustomed to do in the times of the Old Testament.

And now let us mark the manner in which this mighty King enters victoriously into His holy city. The name Jerusalem means "the vision of peace," that is, that open sight of Him Who is our Peace

^a S. John xii. 12—15.

and our All, which Almighty God has prepared for His faithful ones in Heaven. Christ therefore, coming near to Jerusalem, is the King of Peace and of Righteousness drawing every day nearer and nearer to the consummation of His gracious kingdom, and the full salvation of His elect.

The Jerusalem, into which on that day He and His disciples entered bodily, was but a type and figure of the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, the place of His everlasting abode in Heaven. It is His will to come some day, to take solemn possession of that city, to take to Him His great power, and reign. But He will not do this without His redeemed. He will be glorified in His Saints; they, as the Cherubim, shall in a manner uphold and support the Throne of His glory: and this is represented by His vouchsafing to ride upon the humble and useful beast; the ass, and the colt, the foal of an ass. They are at a place where two ways meet; so are all mankind, on their trial here on earth. We are all of us in a situation, more or less, to make our choice; two ways are open to us; the way of death, and the way of life; the broad way which leads to destruction, and the strait gate and narrow way which only leads to God and to Heaven. These ways are set before us, more or less, even in our natural state, and before we are made partakers of the Grace of Christ; but we have not then full power to choose between them. We are tied, as those beasts were, and we are but too certain to take the wrong road, if we could get free of ourselves. Our Lord, then, sends His messengers to untie our bonds and bring us to Him. As He sent two of His disciples to unloose

the ass and the colt, and bring them to the place where He was, so He sends His Church to each one of us, to teach us His Truth, to convey His grace, to undo the chain of our sins, and show us the way to our Saviour, that, He being our Ruler and Guide, we may enter with Him into the Most Holy City. The two disciples represent the Church, as every where in the New Testament, He sends them out two and two, before His Face; and so in the Book of Revelation He gives power to His *two* witnesses. The beasts that are sent for are of two sorts; the one an ass, the other a colt; the ass broken-in and used to work, the colt as yet wild and unbroken; the ass representing the Jewish people, which for many years had borne the yoke of God's law; the colt, the wild and untaught heathen, who had hitherto been left to themselves. Both these are to be brought to Jesus: both to be enrolled in His blessed service, and to be guided by Him to His holy and happy city. And see the gracious message which He sends, when He would have them come to Him. "The Lord hath need of you:" the great God of Heaven and earth, the Creator of those innumerable worlds which we see in the vast Heaven on a starry night, and of infinitely more which we do not see nor guess at, He Whom all the Angels worship, the Almighty, the Eternal, the All-Sufficient, hath need of these poor humble despised beasts, the ass and the colt tied by the way side; that is, He hath need of us poor sinners, both of those that are yet in a heathen state, lying in darkness and the shadow of death, and (more wonderful yet) of those also who having been once His, have, by their own

wilfulness, turned away from Him. He needs both you and me. His love is restless, untired, unsleeping: He will not leave any thing undone for His unworthy creatures: He longs to have us for His own, both almost and altogether, that He may make us both almost and altogether happy. He indeed by His Divine Nature and Perfection hath no need of anything; yet His love causes Him to have, as it were, need of us. He does all, He tries all, He sends His messengers to us one after another, as though He, the great God, could not be happy in His own Heaven without us. Alas, that we should have thought so little of Him, Who thought so much of us as to come down and die for us!

Well, now we are to imagine the two disciples returned to Christ, with the ass and colt under their care, i. e. Jews and Gentiles, converted by the labours of the Apostles whom He sent to them. He graciously receives them and takes them to be His own, becoming their Ruler and Guide all through the rest of their lives; and with them He sets out on His glorious but humble procession towards His chosen everlasting city. And this, my brethren, is what we are, in a manner, witnesses of. We and all men, ever since the great King began to gather His Church to Him, which is now more than eighteen hundred years, have been witnesses of His awful and merciful proceedings in guiding His Church through this world. How have we taken it all? Have we cared for it or no? Have we been for Christ or against Him? For Him, of course, you will all say: but observe it well, brethren, the very great multitude which waited on Him, the day of His entering into

Jerusalem, honoured Him for the time, cried Hosanna, spread their garments, seemed as if they could never make enough of Him: this was on the Sunday; and that same company, the mob of Jerusalem, by the time it was Friday in that week, were so altered that they cried out, "crucify Him, away with Him: we will not have this man, but Barabbas." That was their feeling, I say, on the Friday; but now for the present, on the Sunday, they seemed, to themselves no doubt as well as to others, quite earnest and hearty in His cause. They spread their garments, as they were used to do for great kings; a token of what true believers would do, when they would come in from east, west, north, and south, would count nothing too precious to lay at the feet of Jesus. They cut down also branches from the trees, especially from the palms, and strewed them in the way, thereby signifying how they would turn to His honour all natural things whatever: the beauty of trees, the richness of metals and jewels, the strength of beasts, the vastness of the sea, the sweetness of colours and of music, the brightness of the Heavens; all these things, humble and good persons know how to turn, in good earnest, to Christ's honour and the increase of His kingdom. These are the fresh green branches, plucked by the way side, and strewn before Jesus.

And whereas it is particularly said of this joyful procession, "the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David," the old Fathers always understood this saying to describe the joy of all Saints, both of the Old Testament and of the New, at the coming and

mighty works of the Redeemer. The multitudes that went before are the Prophets and the good Israelites; they that followed, are the Apostles and all who believe on Christ through their word. Both are great multitudes; both most earnestly interested; from day to day, and from night to night, both are for ever glorifying Christ. David for example, and all who of old used his Psalms, were among the multitudes that went before, when they chanted, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee;" or "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec;" or any other of the hundreds of verses which we find in the Psalms, giving glory to Christ. We in our day, when we sing or say the same Psalms, are among the multitudes which followed after. Separated as we are from one another by hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, yet in this we agree, in this we are all one company, that we cry out alike, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord. Peace in Heaven, and glory in the highest." Almost the very words of the Christmas Hymn which the Angels had taught the shepherds at our Saviour's birth. Then it was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace:" now it is "Peace in Heaven, and glory in the highest." What is it all, but the confession which we all make continually to our Lord and Saviour, that He is our God and King; that in Him only we have peace with God, and the hope of everlasting glory. Add to it the prayer, "Hosanna," Help now, and it comes to the very same with those verses of our daily Morning Hymn, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ; Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father;

When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb. When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge: We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious Blood." As often as we join in that sacred Hymn, or in any other like unto it, we are in a manner joining ourselves to the multitude that attended on Jesus Christ when He rode into Jerusalem. More than eighteen hundred years have passed, and that great Procession is still going on, and the holy hymns are still being chanted. We profess to belong to it. Are we joining ourselves to it in earnest or no?

This is the great question for us all, now at this solemn time, when our services for the year are going to begin again, and our Lord's glorious kingdom is nearer by one whole round of holy memorial days. Let each person consider first, whether he has yet applied himself in earnest to the plain simple duty of praising Christ in His Church, so evidently set forth in this history? Our Lord, we know, told the Pharisees, that, if the multitudes about Him should hold their peace, and not take their part in the glad Processional Hymn, the very stones would immediately cry out. It would be such unaccountable strange ingratitude and unbelief, that all things in Heaven and earth would have a voice given them to cry out against it. Our Lord spoke it of those who stood by and cared not to honour Him as He went into Jerusalem; and surely He spoke it of those also, who at any time keep scornfully or

lazily away from the sacred services of His Church. They do not really believe His kingdom, do not heartily care for it: how can they look for any portion in it, when it comes? This is a warning to those among you, my brethren, who being their own masters in respect of going to Church, set themselves no strict rule on the matter, but come or stay away, just as suits their fancy at the time. You see, Christ does not leave you at liberty to make one among such as praise Him or to hold your peace. He expects that you should all praise Him in His Church, one and all, according to the means which He has given you. His eye sees all in the Procession, His ear hears all in the chant. Let not man, woman or child, be wanting, but let us join in heart if we cannot in voice, in the Hosannas of His public service, which He has declared to be so well pleasing in His sight.

But there is a warning also for the constant Church goers. Our very Prayer books seem to ask us, now on the morning of Advent Sunday, how we have used them during the year that is past. We have turned over their leaves regularly. Have our minds and hearts gone along with what we saw there? We have seemed to be following Jesus so far on His way. Have we behaved like those His first followers, whom He so graciously approved? To be like them, we should have stripped ourselves of our precious garments, the things we most value, our own worldly lusts and fancies, and laid them at His feet, at least for the time that we were in Church. The thoughts that were most welcome and delightful to us, if they were not holy and re-

ligious thoughts, should have been diligently banished from our minds, when we were at our prayers here. And not only here, but wherever we were, it should have been a study and a joy to us to find out continually little silent ways of giving up something to our Saviour; of making some sacrifice, more or less, for His sake.

Look at that Jewish multitude waiting on our Lord, as He goes down the mountain: how eagerly they gather, if it be but the branch of a tree to meet Him with it, and shew Him some little respect. When shall we be like them, and see others around us like them? earnestly watching for, and gathering up every little chance of doing Him honour, or waiting on those whom He reckons as part of Himself, that is, on the poor, and the Church. Every morning and evening that we have gone to Church we have joined in Psalms, with the Jewish multitude which went before Christ, and in hymns and canticles with the Christian multitude which followed after Him. We joined with them in appearance, perhaps in voice: did we always try to join with them in heart also? The very stones, our Lord tells us, that is to say, the rude Heathen will cry out, if we hold our peace: they will put us to shame at the last Day, by their greater diligence in their ignorant worship. But might they not well cry out, if they could know the real life and heart of some of us, even during this one year that is now drawing to an end? I say, might not even the stones cry out, could they know how unthankful we have been for mercies, how careless of warnings, how apt to please ourselves, how ready to blame others, how forgetful

of many duties, how negligent of doing as we would be done by, how wanting in improvement of our time? These are the offerings for which *He* looks Who is our Saviour and our King, as He passes on His way in the midst of us, towards the true and heavenly Jerusalem, and casts His Eye round to see if we are following Him, and waiting on Him as we ought. We see Him not; but He sees us, He watches every step, every tone, every look; and soon He will be at the city gate: the great Procession will be over: our Guide will manifest Himself as our Judge. Time will end, and Eternity begin. Then, if not before, we shall wish in earnest that we had regarded His many warnings; that we had laid our wills at His feet, and sought out ways of serving Him. Well for us if we can join with the Saints, who will then chant for the last time, "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." He will soon appear, very soon. Shall we be ready?

SERMON II.

THE ATTENDANTS ON THE JUDGE.

ZECH. xiv. 5.

“The Lord my God shall come and all the Saints with Thee.”

OUR Advent this year begins with S. Andrew's Day; i. e., the time appointed by the Church for penitential meditation on the Coming of Christ begins with a day ordained for remembrance of one of the Saints. The Church then would have us consider the two together. Let us see whether we cannot do so, to our very great profit. It is not a hard thing to make out. Holy Scripture makes the matter plain, in such sayings as that of the Prophet in the text, “The Lord my God shall come and all the Saints with Thee.” It is a very remarkable place, and part of it very obscure and difficult. But this much clearly appears, that the holy Prophet had before his mind's eye the coming of our Lord to judge the world; “The Lord my God shall come:” and that, along with our Lord, he saw by the Holy Ghost the Saints also coming with Him. And you see how his devout soul was in a manner carried away by the wonderful and blessed Vision. For whereas he begins the sentence by saying, “The Lord *my* God shall come,” and you would expect him to end it by

saying, "and all the saints with *Him*:" instead of that he cries out, as it were not able to contain himself, and addresses the Person whom he was thus looking upon by Faith, "and all the Saints with *Thee*."

Who are these Saints that are to come with the Judge, and have their part in that great and awful Assize? Some of them will come with Him from Heaven: as the holy Angels. So He tells us again and again, "^aThe Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy Angels with Him;" and "^bThe Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty Angels, in flaming fire." Some from their places of rest and joy in Abraham's Bosom, or in the Paradise of God, or wherever else He hath prepared a place for His elect, persevering to the end: and of these, some will be in higher places than the rest. To all He will grant to sit with Him on His Throne, but some (if one may say so) on higher, some on lower steps of that Throne. To all good Christians S. Paul's saying is; "^cKnow ye not that we shall judge Angels?" (i. e. the fallen spirits) "^dDo ye not know that the Saints shall judge the world?" Yet some will have a more glorious and exalted place in this judgement: as the twelve Apostles to whom Christ promised they should "^esit on Thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." And the noble martyrs, concerning whom S. John saith in his vision, "^fI saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them."

The Prophets, Zechariah, and S. John saw all these things beforehand in a vision. But one day we shall

^a S. Matt. xxv. 31.

^b 2 Thes. i. 7, 8.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 3.

^d Ib. 2.

^e S. Luke xxii. 30.

^f Rev. xx. 4.

all see them. With our own eyes, actually present, and face to face. Our eyes shall behold, and not another's, the Lord our God coming, and all the Saints with Him. All the Saints, whom I have spoken of from Heaven and Paradise, and besides these, other Saints from earth: those who in that Day shall be found watching for their Lord, their loins girded and their lights burning. They also, S. Paul tells us, shall be caught up together with those other Saints in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall they all, seeing one another, united in one glorious Company be for ever with the Lord. Then the great gathering will be realized, completed, manifested; it is as yet going on invisibly. “^gYe are come unto mount Sion, and unto the City of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the Blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” But first, before they go up with Him into Heaven, they shall, in some way appointed by Him, sit with Him in judgement on the wicked: as He saith in His parable; “^hGather ye together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into My barn.” They will judge bad angels and bad men. “ⁱTo execute upon them the judgement written: this honour have all His Saints.”

Now, whatever else these awful sayings may

^g Heb. xii. 22—24.

^h S. Matt. xiii. 30.

ⁱ Ps. cxlix. 9.

mean one thing is quite clear and distinct; that as surely as we are to meet our Lord Jesus Christ face to face on that day, so are we to meet all His Saints, all who have been, are, or will be, true and faithful ministers or members of Him. They will be there shining with His glory: you will see them all with your very eyes. You will see the angels your own guardians. You will see all those we sing of in the *Te Deum*, The glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs. Both the faithless and the faithful will see Abraham: the readers of Scripture will see its writers, and you will see those of your own time who have set you an example and would have helped you in good.

You will see which among your own acquaintance were Saints, and which were not. Those, e. g. who went in and out at the rich man's gate mentioned in our Lord's parable, and were in the habit, it may be, of passing by the beggar Lazarus, as if there were no one at all lying there. They will behold him bright and glorious and immortal, clothed, not "^kin purple and fine linen" but in "^lthe wedding garment," "^mthe righteousness of the Saints" "ⁿfaring sumptuously every day" at the marriage Supper of the Lamb. And so, it may be, many a one, whom we in our ignorance had passed entirely over, will be found filling a high place in the Register which our Lord keeps of His holy people: and some, whom you are now perhaps positively thinking ill of, may prove in God's sight not only better than yourself,

^k S. Luke xvi. 19.

^l S. Matt. xxii. 11.

^m Rev. xix. 8.

ⁿ S. Luke xvi. 19.

but real Saints, perfect persons, heroes in goodness, receivers of a tenfold reward.

But others, of whom you have thought much, may prove to have been utterly out of God's Book: as that Pharisee, who not only counted himself that he was righteous, but also despised others, was thought well of, no doubt, by many others no less than by himself. He did but repeat a common opinion of the neighbourhood when he said "° God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." Yet in God's sight he was worse than nothing: and so we shall see by and by: O what a wonder, what a surprise, what a disappointment, (as men speak) when they shall behold those in whom they trusted, cast out with weeping and gnashing of teeth! and the humble and quiet ones, whom they had despised as the Pharisee did the Publican, called into some chief seat of the kingdom, with the words "ª Friend, go up higher." Therefore, I beseech you, dear brethren, keep yourselves very low and gentle: judge not, pretend not to say, This man is a Saint; that other is an ordinary Christian. Never think of setting yourself above any other Christian in the world; for, to be sure, you know more harm of yourself than you can possibly know of him. But wait for that day, which will declare, not only who are the Lord's, but also in what order each one stands who is accounted to be His. "ª Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make mani-

° S. Luke xviii. 11.

ª Ib. xiv. 10.

ª 1 Cor. iv. 5.

fest the counsels of the hearts : and then shall every man have praise of God."

Then too thou wilt know what it is to be a Saint ; i. e. an unusually devout and obedient Christian. Thou wilt know and see what such an one really was, even here on his trial in this low imperfect world, when thou seest the power, purity, brightness, the love, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, to which he is exalted in the Kingdom of Heaven. Here, it seems to thee a great matter, when thou seest one man richer than all the rest, another wiser and sharper and more learned, another prosperous and having his wish in all things ; and thou sayest to thyself, Why is this ? why are these people such very distinguished favourites of Heaven, while I am left in poverty and meanness, despised and little thought of, weary and disappointed ? Then, thou wilt understand it all : it will seem to thee clearer than the sun, how wise and good it was of thy merciful Saviour to make this difference between men : and how poor persons, using it rightly, became Saints, and grew to be called very great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Then so far as thou hast gone in thy worldly and unbelieving ways, thou wilt fully understand, in what great mistakes thou hadst been living all thy life long : saying of the humble religious person, "What a poor creature ! how little he knows of the world !" of the pure in heart, "He has no spirit to enjoy himself !" of the meek and forgiving, "What a timid and cowardly worm !" And on the other hand thou wilt understand thy folly in speaking

“^rgood of the covetous, whom God abhorreth,” as if *he* knew best how to make the most of things; and in envying those who prosper in their sins, and wishing thyself like unto them, as we read in the Prophet Malachi, “^scalling the proud happy.”

These, it may be, or something like unto these, are thy weak and worldly thoughts now. How different will they be then! Thou wilt look upon the Saints, upon such as poor Lazarus, who by devout patience turned to a blessing the poverty which he could not help: or upon such as him whom we commemorate this day, S. Andrew, who made himself poor for the love of Christ; and thou wilt say, “This is he whom” I and my worldly companions “^thad sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach: we fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour: how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the Saints!”

In short, it will be with thee in that day, as when the Lord suddenly opened the eyes of the Prophet Elisha’s servant, and he became in a moment aware of his true condition, what manner of beings were around him, and always had been on every side; “^uthe mountain full of horses and chariots of fire.” So shall every thoughtless person say to himself in that day, Heaven and Hell, with all their joys and terrors, have been at every moment of my life within a hair’s breadth of me, and I have gone on trifling, or sleeping, or worse. Well for thee, my brother, whosoever thou art, if thou art brought to this good

^r Ps. x. 3.

^s Mal. iii. 15.

^t Wisdom v. 4. 5.

^u 2 Kings vi. 17.

confession here and now, in this world of trial, before it be too late: so that when the veil is drawn up, and the Lord shall indeed appear with His Saints and Angels, thou mayest behold Him, with fear and awe indeed—what created being can help doing that? but yet with a thankful loving heart, and therefore “with joy and not with grief.” Such grace, if thou find it, can only come from Him Who made thee, and made Heaven for thee, and redeemed thee when thou hadst forfeited it. To be glad when thou seest the Saints, is a blessing which cannot be thine, except He give it, Who shall come with the Saints, Who made them Saints, Who hath said “^v all My delight is upon the Saints.”

One of those whom you will assuredly see in that Day, is the Saint whom we are now commemorating, S. Andrew. You will see him on his apostolical throne, judging as the Holy Scripture prophesies of him; you will know that this is he, who, being called by our Lord Jesus Christ, followed Him without delay: and the sight, and the remembrance, will either be a joy and a glory to you, or it will be an overwhelming shame and confusion; a joy and a glory, if you have followed so holy an example; a shame and confusion, if you have gone your own way. For consider; whoever you are; Christ has surely called you at some time or other; if never before, He is calling you now: did you follow Him, are you following Him, as this Saint did, without delay? I am much afraid you said to yourself, and that more than once, “Time enough yet, I will come when others do, I shall have many more opportu-

^v Ps. xvi. 3.

nities." I am afraid you may be even now saying this in your secret heart. If so, be sure you will hear of it again: at least the joy and glory of seeing Christ and His Saints will be lessened, even if it be not entirely forfeited. How can it be otherwise? You promised to follow Christ at once when you took your vow before God "to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil" and "to believe all the articles of the Christian-Faith." What did that promise mean? you know very well; you cannot pretend to be ignorant. It meant that, when you clearly hear Christ's word calling you away from anything, you give up that thing at once, and follow Him. This is what you have set your name to, before God and His holy Angels: this is what you have pledged your soul to. Your promise is down in His Book: and in the same Book is exactly written down, how you have kept the promise. That Book will be opened when you are being judged in the Presence of Christ and His Saints, and you will be judged out of that which is written in it concerning yourself. A fearful thing, but most true and certain. In the whole word of God nothing is more plainly written. "The hour is coming, and now is." Soon, sooner by far than it now seems to you, Christ will be sitting openly on His Judgement seat, His Saints with Him, and you standing before Him. I want you to fix your mind upon this thought, that you, your own very self, are the person who will have to undergo this: you will see it for yourself, and not another for you. How ever will you be able to bear it?

O, then, if you have kept your vow and promise, if you have really forsaken the things which you

know your Saviour hates, if you have really acquainted yourself with Him, then Jesus Christ coming to judge will be awful indeed—how should it be otherwise? But it will be relief, joy, peace, unspeakable to you; even as the coming of a kind familiar friend, long expected, long prayed for, but quite uncertain as to the time of it, until the very moment ordained shall come. Who can express or conceive in any degree what it will be to him, should he be so happy as to see Heaven opened and Jesus Christ coming to judgement, and to feel sure in his heart that it is a happy coming for him? As it is written “^w when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” On the other hand, think of the shame and anguish, the utter, unspeakable desolation and shrinking of heart, when the world which you promised to forsake and have not forsaken, will be found forsaking you for ever, and passing away, being burned under your feet! what will you then do? whom will you go to? To which of your bad companions, or of the evil spirits whom you have preferred to your Saviour, will you now turn? Alas! there is but one Name in Heaven or earth that can do you any good in that Day: the Name of *Jesus*: and the virtue of that you have unhappily sinned away; you have left off calling upon it, or have called upon it only in hypocrisy, scorn, or blasphemy; and it can no more do you any good: your coming in that Name can no more be pleaded before God as a reason why He should hold you guiltless.

In that day and hour there will be no mistake,

^w S. Luke xxi. 28.

either as to who are Saints, or as to the misery of not being such. You must and will judge rightly then between this world and the next ; between God and the devil ; between Christ's holy word and the poor vain excuses by which the Evil one would tempt you. There will be no one by, then, to quiet your conscience, and countenance you in the vain thoughts and sayings, by which you pretend to keep yourself easy here. You must and will judge rightly *then* ; why not take the trouble to judge rightly *now* ? Pray and strive that you may, now while God gives you time ; now while the Judge is yet standing before the door ; now while the Holy Spirit vouchsafes yet to strive with you ; now while good men and good Angels are at hand to keep you in their several ways ; now before the moment is come, after which Satan will have power to drag you away to punishment, and there will be no word from the Judge to stay him.

SERMON III.

THE GREAT ASSIZE.

DAN. vii. 10.

“The Judgement was set and the Books were opened.”

THIS day week, as you know, there were in our own immediate neighbourhood a number of prisoners expecting their trial. They had been charged with offences, more or less grievous; and they were, we must fear, most of them, conscious of more or less guilt. The day, almost the hour, of their trial was fixed; and they were well aware, that nothing in their power could put it off. They knew that if they were found guilty, the consequences would be serious, according to their guilt: to some of them, it was a matter of life, or of the saddest kind of death. They knew that they were to be tried, not according to their own fancies, nor to the fancies of their companions, nor to the way of the world, but according to the Law of the Land: a strict rule, which they could not alter: and a rule which had taken its severe course upon thousands and tens of thousands before them, and upon many perhaps, within their own knowledge. What, think you, must have been the feelings of those unfortunate persons, shut up as they were in prison, and at

leisure to think it all over : to wonder how it would be when the very time should come to which they had been, some of them, so long looking forward ; to count the days and the hours, and say in their hearts each time they heard the clock strike, now it is one hour nearer ?

In the first place, we can hardly fancy them altogether indifferent and careless about it ; or if there were some such, (as, no doubt, sin and the Evil one who teaches sin, have a wonderful power to harden men's hearts,) still it seems to us a monstrous unnatural thing, and we feel that it makes their condition more fearful and shocking. But I suppose we should not be wrong in imagining that nine out of ten of them, however they might pretend to brave it out, were in their secret hearts very much taken up with the thought of their coming trial, that it mingled almost with every other thought.

Again, would not each one of the accused, according to his degree of knowledge, consider anxiously what there might be in the law, which might either condemn him, or supply a chance of his acquittal ? Would he not bitterly regret, from beginning to end of his past life, anything he knew against himself which might go towards proving him guilty ? Would it not all be apt to come into his mind, and to fill him with fear and anguish, and cause him to wish from the bottom of his heart, that he had never chosen the bad company, nor taken the first step in the lawless and wicked ways, now on the point of bringing him to a sad end ? Would he not, if he had the means, engage the best advocate he could, and put his whole cause in his hand, and take all

opportunities of conferring with him, that his cause might be pleaded as thoroughly and as skilfully as possible? And lastly do you not think, that persons knowing themselves to be guilty, and expecting their trial within a few days, might very well consider whether it would not be best for them at once to plead guilty, and throw themselves on the mercy of the judge?

Well, brethren, whoever you are, this, that I have been trying to set forth, is your own case: and you know it very well, if you will but turn your minds to it. You know that you are in this world, in a place among God's creatures from which you cannot escape, and which is so far, therefore, like a close prison. You know that you are here for a short time, under safe custody, your keepers being God's holy and mighty Angels, and that before long you will be summoned hence to take your trial, and be found guilty, or not guilty. All this you know will be; only you do not know when. The unhappy persons who were tried and condemned a few days ago, within a few miles of us, and are now looking forward to a sad and painful death after a few days more; what, most likely are their thoughts now? What would they give have considered over God's awful judgements long long ago, and so to have kept themselves by His grace from the bad passions and sinful coveteousness and all the unbelieving ways, which, being indulged, have brought them on through cruel malice and murder to such an end as they are now to undergo? What think you are they now about? Preparing, we hope, for their mournful passage into the other world, of which alas! they

have hitherto thought but too little. God grant they may be so employed! God, for His Son's sake, touch their hearts, and have mercy upon them! If you have human feeling, you will say Amen to this prayer. But observe it, my brethren, you will at the same time be praying for yourselves. For the condition of these poor men, both their former condition in which they were a week ago, and their present condition, in which they are now, is in some sense your condition: and not yours only but that of every man living. In one way of taking it, we are all prisoners awaiting our trial, as they were last Sunday: in another sense we are all condemned to die, as they are at this moment. We are all condemned to the death of the body; but for the second death, the death of the soul, we are all as yet prisoners committed for trial. You, to whom I am speaking, are to be tried with the rest; well then, brother, what are you about? Are you at all preparing yourself, getting ready for the trial? You know not, of course, when it will be. That is one of the times and seasons, which the Father hath kept in His own power. But you know enough of the manner of it, to enable you, if you will, to get ready for it. You know for instance, Who will be the Judge. It will not be one whom you can deceive, as there might be a chance of your deceiving any the sharpest judge on earth. It will be He Who "searcheth the heart," Whose "Eyes are as a flame of fire," "in every place, beholding the evil and the good." It will not be one who, after he has judged will be at last afraid or unable to punish. For God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all: a Light that becometh a consu-

ming fire to those who have gone on provoking Him: as it is written, “^aRighteousness and Judgement are the habitation of His seat: there shall go a fire before Him and burn up His enemies on every side.” And as the Prophet saw in his vision, “^bThe Ancient of Days did sit, His throne was like a fiery flame, and the wheels thereof as burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him; thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the Judgement was set, and the Books were opened.”

“The Books were opened.” Take notice, I beseech you, of that. It is a thing very distinctly repeated in the Scripture notices of the day of judgement. Daniel saw it in this vision, five hundred years before our Saviour was born, and S. John in the Revelations saw it again; our Saviour Himself appearing, to shew it him years after He had gone into Heaven. “^cI saw a great white Throne and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” The Books then will be opened: but what Books? There are three which Scripture mentions plainly. First, there will be the Book of God’s law, containing the rule by which we must all be judged. Secondly, there will be the Book of account, or record, which the All-seeing keeps, of all our goings on here, whatever we say,

^a Psalm xcvi. 2, 3. ^b Daniel vii. 9, 10. ^c Rev. xx. 11, 12.

do or think, even “every idle word,” and “every secret thought, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;” God sets it all down. And thirdly, there will be the Book in which will be found written the names of those whom the great Judge in His unsearchable love and wisdom, hath decreed to pardon and to save at last. You will easily perceive that the two first mentioned Books answer very well to what must be produced in every judgement or trial of any prisoner among men. There must be always a law to judge him by, which they who are to try him and pass sentence, must know. There must be also witness for and against him, either persons testifying that they know so and so of him, or papers or other things which serve for tokens and remembrances of the truth; and it is all, you know, put down in writing; the judge makes notes of it, and passes sentence accordingly. Now the Book of the law, when we are judged, will be the Holy Bible. Sin is the transgression of that law; Righteousness is the keeping of it. And the Books, or records of evidence for or against us, will be partly, what our own consciences will in that hour be obliged to confess, partly what the evil spirits, our accusers then, as now our tempters, will have it in their power to allege; but chiefly what our Judge and “the Searcher of hearts” knoweth always without being told, and will then bring forward in the hearing of the whole world which will keep silence before Him not being able to gainsay Him. He will speak and say, “^aCome ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of

^a S. Matt. xxv. 34—36.

the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison and ye came unto Me." And again, turning to the left, He will speak and say, "Depart from Me, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not." Thus will the book of each man's behaviour be opened, and by comparison of it with the Bible he will be judged.

Your Bibles, then, and the use you have made of them, will have a very great deal to do with your standing or falling in that great and dreadful Day. I might say, all will depend on them. Ponder now on this, my brethren, for on this particular Sunday especially the Church our Mother puts you in mind of it. Did you not hear what she said to you in the Epistle, that the Holy Scriptures are written for you to learn, not simply to learn as a lesson, but so as to have hope, i. e. a reasonable hope of going to Heaven, of being acquitted at the last day? And have you not been praying to the Holy Ghost over and over in to-day's service, that by His Holy Word you may "embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ" i. e. that you may have comfort from your Bibles in the Day of Judgment? This has been God's lesson to you, and this

your prayer to God to-day. But have you really used yourselves so to think of your Bibles and so to use them? That is, when you read or heard anything out of that blessed Book, especially out of that part of it which is properly called the new law, the New Testament or Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, have you really regularly, and in earnest, said in your hearts, "I shall hear of this again: this lesson, this rule, this warning, will come to me again, when I am standing before Him, Who now sends it to me: and when I am looking Him in the face, He will ask me, how I have kept it: and what if I should be forced to remain speechless, like the man without the wedding garment? What if this commandment, which was assuredly meant unto life, I should then find to be unto death?" I ask you, every one of you, have you used yourself on reading the holy and exact laws of God, to commune in this way with your own heart? Having heard or read, have you feared to break them, knowing that you will be confronted with them in that Day? If not, I much fear that your Bible will be a terrible witness against you, at least for the time past of your life. Whether it will be so for the short time which remains, will depend entirely upon your manner of using it during that time.

Perhaps you are even now saying inwardly, "I never could read my Bible: how then should I be tried by it?" Even as I have sometimes known persons clearly convicted of the most grievous offences think to get off by alleging that they did not know the consequence of those offences; they were not aware that the punishment was so severe.

The judge would always tell such persons, that, in such open crimes as murder or blasphemy or the like, no man could be really ignorant, no man could suppose that he was innocent in committing them, though he were not able to read the words of the law, nor had ever heard them exactly. And you will find by and by, if you think to plead your ignorance now, that you will not be able to plead it then. The Judge will tell you and your own conscience will bear Him witness, that even if you could not read, nor understand a great many things, you still ought to have known better than to steal, or swear, or behave unkindly or unchastely, or to tell lies or neglect your Church or your prayers. So far, you knew how to do good: so far, depend upon it, your not doing it was sin, and will be proved as such against you, and when you are asked, why sentence should not pass you will not be able to say a word. And in many other instances, not so gross and flagrant, I very much fear its being said to many of you, "If you did not exactly know what the Bible says of such and such and such a matter, (e. g., of your duty to God's Church and Clergy, or of Confirmation or of the Sacrament of Holy Communion,) still you knew that there was such a Book, that it said *something* of those matters: and if you had had a thorough good will to please your Saviour, a real hearty love of Him, you might have listened at Church, you might have enquired of those who know, you might have prayed to God to give you a better understanding." If the Judge should say to you something like this when you are tried, shall you be able to reply to Him? If you cannot read, surely you can hear and listen.

Neither must you say, "I hope to be forgiven, for I am sure I never gave it a thought. If I had *observed* that such and such things were put down as duties for me to do, I should have taken more pains about them: but it never struck me in that light." The Judge will say, "you heard, perhaps you read: why did you not *mark*? How could you call Me, Lord, Lord, and not perceive that you ought to do the things that I said?"

Neither may you say in that Day, that you did hear, read and mark, but when the time came for practice, you forgot, it seemed all gone from you. The answer will be, "you might have learned, you might have fixed it all in your mind and heart by the help of God's Good Spirit, which He would have given you had you asked Him in earnest."

Least of all, will that plea be allowed at the bar of Jesus Christ, which seems to pass so current in this world; I mean when men say, "The Bible is of course within my reach, I sometimes read and hear and try to remember, but I have no taste for such things, it is not my line, I cannot enter into it, though for many it is well enough I dare say." The world, I say, seems generally contented with this sort of plea. But will He be satisfied with it, Who is coming to judge the world? Nay. For your saying, you could not like your Bible, is much the same as if you said, you could not like your Saviour, nor God, nor Heaven. And what good would it do to such a man, though Heaven's gates were this moment to open and let him into that happy place? He could not be happy there. No. If your mind is now earthly you must strive and pray in earnest to have it made

heavenly. You must labour and ask God by His heavenly grace to give you that true conversion of heart which shall make you love the Bible above all other books, and obey what is written in It for love's and not for custom's sake. Then you will cast away all your vain excuses, and throw yourself wholly on His mercy. And then, this Book of the new law, having been your guide here will be your hope and not your condemnation, when it is opened and you are judged out of it.

SERMON IV.

THE AWFUL RECKONING.

Rev. xx. 12.

“The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the Books, according to their works.”

DID you ever lay it to heart, my brethren, how the life of man on earth abounds in reckoning and account-days of one kind and another? Every week or fortnight comes a reckoning day with most of those who earn their daily bread by their labour. Every quarter or half-year comes a rent day, much thought of both by those who pay, and by those who receive. Every year the books of those who keep shops or farms or other money-concerns of consequence require to be balanced and put exactly right. Every time an Inspector or Examiner comes, to look after a school, or a hospital, or a workhouse, or any other Institution, is a day of reckoning for the parties concerned in the management of that place. If it is but a class of school-children who are examined, they do, as it were, give an account how they have profited in their learning and behaviour. If a regiment or army is reviewed, or the crew of a ship mustered, it is all the same, they too are giving an

account. Thus, in one way or another, our life is full of reckoning-days. And most of us, are, I suppose, well aware of these two things concerning them; first, how strong the temptation is to put off preparing for them; and secondly, how very grievous the consequences are, when men do so. Some out of indolence and sloth and mere unwillingness to exert themselves, go on saying; "To-morrow will be time enough," until no time at all is left, and when their affairs come to be looked into, they find to their amaze that they have fallen deeply in debt. Others have a suspicion that it is so, but cannot bear to think it, and try to forget the subject. Others are carried headlong by strong fancy or passion, and determine to indulge themselves, whatever it may cost. And so in all these several lines people come to a bad end, because they would not look on to the day of account: they fail, and are ruined, and nobody wonders at it. Every one says, "it is just what might have been expected." Nobody wonders at it; and if they had abundance of warning, and sufficient means to provide what was due if they would, nobody pities them, nor thinks it at all a hard case. Concerning such, the proverb is used, "They have made their own bed and they must lie on it." They knew that the Account-day, the Rent-day, the Inspection day, was at hand; but they took no pains to prepare for it.

Alas! that men should so clearly see the duty and wisdom of others in regard of the accounts of this world, and yet take no thought themselves for the great, the overwhelming account, to which all alike are drawing nigh, in the world to come. For

that great and dreadful Day will indeed be a reckoning-day and a day of account, in comparison whereof all these earthly accounts are as nothing. Here e. g. we often see persons miserable and down-cast, because the time is at hand when they are to pay their rent the sum due to the owner of the house they live in, or the land they cultivate, for the use of it for so long. And they turn this way and that in anxiety and confusion, wondering how they shall be able to contrive it. For the time, it is their chief care, they are quite entirely taken up with it. Now your account and mine with our Lord Jesus Christ is in the nature of a rent. He teaches us so Himself in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, who having the vineyard let to them, the owner whereof had taken all possible care to make it convenient and profitable for them—building a winepress for the grapes, and a tower to watch over the place, and a fence to guard it—these wicked husbandmen, when the rent was demanded of them, insulted and murdered, first the messengers and afterwards the only son of their master. Now, brethren, every bad Christian is just one of these husbandmen. His own soul is the land which he farms, having to aid him all Christian blessings and privileges—the Bible, the Church, the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit of God, promised in answer to diligent prayer. The rent which God demands of him is the fruit of good works according to the measure of help given him. That is your rent, every one of you; good, obedient, dutiful, Christian ways, in proportion to the instruction and other means of grace which you enjoy. That is your rent; and if,

when the day of payment comes, you be found still refusing to pay it, there is but one sentence for you. “^a He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render Him the fruits in their seasons.”

In other parables our Lord compares our condition to that of persons, entrusted with their master's money on condition of “occupying,” i. e. profitably employing it, until their master come and demand it of them. Each one of you is such a person. You have your pound, or your talent, your two or five pounds or talents, as it has pleased the great Owner of all to entrust you with more or less ; and you are left to turn it to the best account, according to your own conscience and the rules He has given you, against the great audit-Day, when He will come and reckon with you. Beware of imagining that anything you have is your own, and that you may do what you please with it. What will you do in that Day, if you have lived and died in such thoughts ; if e. g., you were a shepherd, a father, or master of a family, a teacher, a priest, or in any way over others, and thought you might go on pleasing yourself and leaving them to do the same, how will you bear it when the question shall be asked you ; “^b where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock ?” Again, beware, I beseech you, of the false and fretful dream which deceives but too many, that they, having less than others, (so they imagine) to answer for, need not fear being called to account : like the unprofitable servant who hid his pound or

^a S. Matt. xxi. 41.

^b Jer. xiii. 20.

talent in the earth, because he had only one, and in his heart complained of his master as a hard man. No, depend upon it, the poor beggar Lazarus, who was laid at the rich man's gate full of sores, had *his* account to give, as well as the proud rich man himself. Had he been cross, discontented, impatient, envious of his neighbour, unmindful of his God; would he then, think you, have been "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom"? Alas! it is sad, but most true to think, that he too would have had his portion on the other side of the great gulf. The fretful poor man and the proud rich man, one as much as the other, have chosen their "portion in this world"; and in this world alone they can have it, be it much or little of its kind.

Therefore Holy Scripture, and especially He who is the Author and Owner of Holy Scripture, our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself says plainly to each one of us, to every man woman and child; "Be ready; for thou art My servant, I have put thee in trust with thine own soul at least; a thing so precious to Me, that I died for it; and I am surely coming to reckon with thee."

But now take notice of some points, in which this reckoning will differ from all on earth. One is, that, whereas the time of paying rent or the time for paying interest of money is fixed beforehand, and every one knows when to be ready, the time when the Great Householder will come to demand His rent, or the use of His pounds or talents, remains a secret, known to none, not even to the Angels in Heaven. Why does He keep it a secret? You know

very well; it is that you may be always ready. And what are you about now? Are you at all ready in any respect? Are you turning your mind at all that way? Are you not rather attending to anything else; wasting your precious time, and all the rest of His gifts? And yet every moment of that time, every one of those gifts, is being set down in His Book; and you will hear of it again. O why will you throw yourself away?

For there is yet another circumstance in that last account, which cannot be in any other. In the books which shall then be opened, there will be no error, no mistake whatever, no possibility of disputing the correctness of the account. There will be nothing to add, nothing to take away. Here, when things are brought forward against you, and you are charged with this or that fault, you generally have a good deal to say for yourself, you make out that you knew no better, that you could not help it, that any one else would have done the same or worse; or some other pretence of the same kind. But *then*, as our Lord's Parable of the wedding garment prophesies, *then* you will be speechless. Then "every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God."

For this also will be peculiar in the judgement or audit of that Day; that every person will come to it, known beforehand to be grievously in debt: as another parable teaches "^d When He had begun to reckon, one was brought unto Him, which owed Him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold,

^d S. Matt. xviii. 24, 25.

and his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made." That is to say, we all, as children of Adam, sinful children, must sadly confess that we are our Lord's debtors in the value of all that we are or have; we owe Him all and we have nothing at all to pay. Therefore, whereas it is said that we shall be judged according to our works, so that what good a man does, says, or thinks, will, in some sense, be placed to his account, we must understand that this is altogether His free mercy, in that having pardoned us, when He made us Christians for His Son's sake, He afterwards gave us His Holy Spirit, enabling us to serve and please Him: and in the end will reward, not so much our works as His own work in us, placing it as it were to our account. What are we about then, dear brethren, in respect of this treasure in Heaven which we ought even now to be laying up for ourselves? The Books are opened, I mean the day-books, so to call them, in which are recorded day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, all things that in any way make up our behaviour on earth, all that causes us to be better or worse before God. They are opened, now, to be written in. Our sins, as fast as we commit them, are there "engraven with a pen of iron and with the point of a diamond:" the evil words which flow from our lips are not altogether lost and scattered in air; they do not pass away as if they had never been. Every one, even the idlest, is registered, and will be brought to account. Who would not have feared to say this, had it only been his own interpretation of Holy Scripture? But now we fear to say any other, for we have heard the Judge de-

clare it with His own mouth: “^eThat every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of Judgement.” You know, in some sort, what you would feel, my brethren, if, being in any company, you became aware that some one was watching you intently, following you with his eyes, noticing whatever you do; and more, setting it down in writing, with a full purpose of bringing it forward to your harm or credit by and by. Whatever else you felt, you could not be indifferent to such a thing. You would be more or less uneasy and restless, more or less anxious, what the result might be. Now you know, there is a heavenly Watcher Who is doing this very thing by you, keeping an exact and unerring account of all you are about at all times, alone or in company, by night or by day. “^fHe is about your path and about your bed and spieth out all your ways.” In His Book are all your members written, and all the uses you make of each of them.

While we tremble, (how can we help it?) and are ready to sink into the earth, at the expectation of seeing and hearing those pages one day unrolled, we are nevertheless permitted, so great is His condescending mercy, to hope that if there have been any good works in which we have religiously walked, they also are set down in the same most true record, and will in some way be recited out of it. For so much we heard out of the Epistle just now: “then shall every man have praise,” i. e., his due and proper portion of praise, not of men but “of God,” and our Lord and Judge and Recorder has pledged Himself,

^e S. Matt. xii. 36.

^f Ps. cxxxix. 2.

“^g whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My Name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.” Not that a sinner, not that any creature can indeed make Christ his debtor, God forbid! But it pleases Him, as I said, to reward His own work in us, and to keep an account of it, that it may be rewarded. Nothing at all that you do for His sake, not the least faint endeavour, if sincere, shall fall to the ground. Therefore, dear brethren work heartily, work cheerfully for Him: rejoice that you are working in His sight: and while your heart aches, as well it may, at the remembrance of the many opportunities you have trifled away, the many entries you have forced Him to set down against you in His awful Book, yet let it refresh and comfort you to believe that there are bright pages also in that Book. He invites you to bear fruit, that may *abound* to your account. That which He now helps you to will and to do of His good pleasure, though it is all His, He will, in His love and bounty, regard as yours and will crown and reward you accordingly.

Only never forget that, in that great and final settling of accounts, all will depend on this one thing, whether you, being by nature infinitely in debt to Him, and having nothing at all to pay, have truly and with all your heart turned to Him, cast yourself upon Him, sincerely tried to love and please Him as your only Saviour, and the One sure hope and joy of your soul. For it is, in this our mysterious reckoning with our King and Father in Heaven, as if a man, overpowered with debt were told of a sufficient

surety, one who, for mere love and pity, would take the whole debt on himself, if only he were properly applied to, and in good time. Such a Surety we have, one and all of us, in the Seed of the woman, the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son made Man for us: He is all sufficient to pay our debt, and in love unspeakable, most willing to do so, blotting out "by His own Blood" the hand writing that is against us. But then we must apply His Blood: we must resort to Him: we must seek Him out in good earnest, and in good time. What is "resorting to Him?" Coming where He may be found; as we read in the Gospel that many resorted unto Him when He was in sight among men; i. e. they came where He was, and that, not once and away, but regularly, and as a customary thing. Well, brethren, you know where to find Him; you know it very well in your own hearts, however sadly some may appear to disregard it. You know that Christ is to be found here in His own house. If therefore you would really resort to Him as your Saviour, you will come here; not now and then, when you are in the mind, but regularly. You know that He is to be found in His Holy Communion, as it is written, "^hHe was known of them in breaking of bread." You will (if you care at all to stand well in His Books) lose no more time, but give your names in at once to be prepared for Holy Communion, or to return to it if you have forsaken it; and if already a Communicant you will pray and strive to come more worthily than ever. You know that He is to be found in His Poor, and that whensoever ye will, ye

^h S. Luke xxiv. 35.

may do Him good in them ; therefore you will care more than ever for the Poor, and deny yourself more and more for their sake. By keeping rules like these, you will be really resorting to Christ. But then you must do it "in time." What is doing it "in time?" Doing it directly, immediately, out of hand, without waiting to be older, or better off, or more encouraged or invited, or anything else. Are you doing this, my brethren? Are you really, earnestly, even now, in the way of seeking Christ, Christ Himself and His own blessed Presence, in prayer at home, in devout Churchgoing, in Holy Communion, in waiting on the Poor? Are you living in a real endeavour to do all this? And if not, why not? O, answer this question, I beg and pray of you, fairly and truly to your own conscience. If you feel wrong, own it at once : and take care that the answer you make may help and not hurt you in the Day of Judgement.

SERMON V.

THE BOOK OF LIFE.

REV. XX. 12.

“Another Book was opened, which is the Book of Life.”

HOLY Scripture informs us of three several Books, out of which every one of us will be judged at the Last Day, each one according to his works. The first of these Books is Holy Scripture itself, the written law or word of God, the rule whereby our faith and practice will be measured, as in ordinary trials before a judge and jury it is measured by the law of the land. Of this something was said to you on the second Sunday in this Advent, the day in which the Church instructs us how to use the Holy Bible as a help to preparing ourselves to meet our God. This rule, the Bible, is the same (of course) for one as for another. The second Book which will be opened on that day will be several for each one of us, being the account which the All-seeing God even now keeps of the doings of each one, his thoughts, words and deeds: and to this attention was drawn last Sunday, being the day on which we are reminded of the several helps each one of us has from the Church, the Clergy, the Sacraments and the

Prayer Book, in keeping his own separate account with his God ; so that it will be quite his own fault if he fail at last. Having thus spoken both of the Book of the law according to which God will judge us, and of the Book of our own doings which will supply the evidence for or against us, I come this Sunday to speak of a third Book, which the Holy Ghost expressly tells us will be opened on that day ; “ Another Book was opened, which is the Book of Life.” As if one should say, after the explanation of the law and examination of the witnesses, the judge proceeded to pass sentence. The Book of Life, I say, answers to the sentence of the Judge. For as we read in the last verse of the chapter, “ ^aWho-soever was not found written in the Book of Life, was cast into the lake of fire.” His name not being set down in that Book is a token that he is none of Christ’s. And if he do not belong to Christ in that Day, he must belong to Christ’s enemy for ever.

But let us now consider somewhat at large what Scripture tells us of this Book of Life : for it is mentioned there at sundry times and in divers manners : as if God Almighty had willed to keep it all along in the thoughts of the heart of His people. The first instance, as far as I know, is what passed between God and Moses, when Moses was in the Mount, interceding for the people who had made them a golden calf. In Moses’ great love he was content, as S. Paul after him, to be accursed from the Lord if he might obtain pardon for them. “ ^bIf Thou *wilt* forgive their sin !—and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written : ”

^a Rev. xx. 15.

^b Ex. xxxii. 32.

evidently signifying that the Lord had a book written, and in it the names of all His true servants, all whom He regarded as really in the purpose of their hearts belonging to Him; as in after times we are told of the writing of the house of Israel, i.e. the list of all that belonged to Israel, regularly kept and certified. For each tribe had its register, as each parish among us: more especially the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, and whoever was not found named in that register could not be accepted as belonging to the tribe. It was no strange idea, then, to the Israelites, when they were told of God's keeping a book in which His people's names were entered: nor yet that, being entered, they might be still blotted out for their sins, for so God expressly assured Moses: "Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book:" as much as to say, that Moses could not make atonement for others, nor yet suffer for any sins but his own. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die:" the sentence against that person is, to have his own name blotted out of God's Book and not another's for him.

So again it is part of David's prayer, or rather of God's awful curse pronounced on the enemies of Christ in the 69th Psalm, "Let them be wiped out of the book of the living, and not be written among the righteous." And again the angel declares to the Prophet Daniel, as concerning the Last Day; "At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the Book." And in Malachi; "a book of remembrance was written

^c Ex. xxxii. 33.^d Ezek. xviii. 4.^e Ps. lxix. 29.^f Dan. xii. 1.^g Mal. iii. 16.

before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name." In Ezekiel certain false prophets are told "that they shall not be written in the writing of the house of Israel." God would not count them Israelites. Our Lord Himself told the seventy disciples not to rejoice that the spirits were subject unto them, i. e., that they had power to cast out devils, but rather to "^h rejoice, because their names were written in Heaven." S. Paul writing to the Philippians makes mention of Clement and his other fellow-labourers, as well as of certain women which laboured with him in the Gospel, "ⁱ whose names," he says, were "in the Book of Life." And to the Hebrews he reckons it among the great Christian privileges, that they were "^k come to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in Heaven." In the Revelations it is mentioned several times. It is called "the Lamb's" i. e., Christ's, "Book of Life." Promise is made to him "that overcometh," i. e., who keeps his baptismal vow, fighting victoriously against the world, the flesh and the devil, "^l he shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." Elsewhere in the same Book, the power and glory of this world being signified by a foul and monstrous beast, they only, we read, shall not worship him, nor wonder at him, whose names are written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

^h S. Luke x. 20.

^k Heb. xii. 23.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 3.

^l Rev. iii. 5.

We are to conceive then of this Book of Life in some such way as the following. The return of our Lord and heavenly Master, when He shall have received His kingdom, will be as if some great monarch should appear suddenly among his subjects at a time when they were most of them in direct and open rebellion against him, and having assembled them together, and considered each case according to its merits, should pass sentence, by solemn proclamation of pardon, acceptance, and a high place in the kingdom to a certain number whose names were found in a list, then and there to be produced, but until then kept as a great secret in the king's own bosom. So it is foretold in the description of the judgement itself; "^m whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." So afterwards, in the account of those who should inhabit the holy city, new Jerusalem, "ⁿ there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

Every thing therefore, positively every thing, will depend in that hour upon this one circumstance, whether our names are then found in the roll and list of those who shall be saved or no. What an awful, what an overwhelming moment, when all the children of Adam shall be gathered before the Throne, waiting for their sentence! When accused persons are in court expecting the verdict or sentence which is to be to them life or death, and not knowing which it will be, even then we feel that we

^m Rev. xix. 15.ⁿ Rev. xxi. 27.

can hardly understand the deep, silent, breathless anxiety, with which they and their friends look and listen for the word, guilty or not guilty. But what is all that to the expectation, the terror, the agony, when the Book of Pardon shall be opened, and they know not perhaps yet, if it contains their name or no; when they hear one after another, perhaps of those nearest and dearest to them, called and invited, as having found favour in the Judge's sight, and being known to Him by name, but their own name is passed over, the others are taken and they are left; and they know themselves left to be cast out with the mass who will not then be named separately, but be bound, as tares, in dishonoured heaps and bundles, fit only for the fire. The Lamb's Book of Life: so it is called, because all who are registered in it are His, wholly and only; and the Life, for which they are registered, is His; He is the Lord their Redeemer, by Whom they escape death. He is the Lord, their Head and Fountain and Root, from Whom and by partaking of Whom they receive and enjoy their spiritual life. And some have supposed that His saving Name is the first written in that Book; according to the Psalm in which the Son of Man speaks of His gracious Incarnation: "a body hast Thou prepared for me;... then said I, lo, I come (in the volume" or first leaf "of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O my God." Christ's saving Name, the Name of Jesus, may then be supposed to stand at the head of the list; and after it will come the glorious Saints, in an order known to Him, but of which we only know that the

rule and law of it will be, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted;" the lowliest of all, whoever she or he may prove to have been, will then stand highest of all.

But now, brethren, I am going to mention a very serious matter indeed, and one which most nearly concerns every one of us without exception; and it is this. We, we ourselves, have reason to believe that our own names, one and all of them, were once in this awful and mysterious Book of Life; yes, even the worst Christian that ever was, may believe that his name has appeared there; even as the name of Lucifer, he who is called "son of the morning," did once stand, and stand very high, in the roll and list of God's good and holy angels; even as the name of Judas Iscariot appears in all the Gospel enumerations of the glorious company of Apostles. This brings with it the fearful thought, that a name may be there and yet may be blotted out. You may have enlisted; we all have enlisted, as soldiers in the army of the true Joshua; we may have hired ourselves, we have all done so, as servants in the family of the great and heavenly Householder; and yet we may be discarded at last as rebels, deserters, unfaithful. Over and over, as we have seen, it is intimated in Holy Scripture, that a name once in the Book of Life is not sure to continue for ever; it may, too often it will, be blotted out. If such a thing were impossible, how should it have been said to Moses, "Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book?" or of the unbelieving Jews, "Let them be wiped out of the book of the living, and not be written among the right-

eous?" or how should it be promised to such as prevail against temptation, "I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." You will observe that the great reward is promised, not to all who were even at any time made mention of in that record, but to every one that shall be *found* written in the Book; *found* at that very time, when the Book shall be opened and the names read out of it. Alas! to have had it there before, perhaps for a long portion of your life, will only increase the condemnation, if you have willfully forced the great Householder to disown and blot out your name at last. For His Spirit tells us plainly, "It had been better for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us."

It is certain, as I said, that our names have been in the Book of Life, as many of us as were baptized in our infancy. Our Prayer Book plainly teaches this: for whereas we read in Holy Scripture, "None shall enter into the heavenly Jerusalem but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life," we read also in the Prayer Book, "It is certain by God's word, that children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved." They could not be saved, if their names were not in that Book. Our names, then, all of us, your names, my brethren, have been each of them in that Book; for if you had died in infancy you would have been saved. Are they there, now? now, at this very moment? Do not put the question by,

as if it were one of God's secrets, impossible to be answered in any wise. It is not so, my brethren. There are signs and tokens, distinctly set down in those passages of Scripture which tell us concerning the Book of Life, whereby each one of you may probably judge for himself (I do not say for another) whether his name is at this moment on the Book of Life or no: e. g. if you be really mourning and sad at heart for your own iniquity past and present, and for the sin which you see everywhere prevailing around you; grieved and down-hearted, as you would be for some great earthly trouble, sickness, or poverty, or loss of friends; this is a good sign of your name being where you would wish. For so we read in the Prophet, that the destroyers were to pass over those who had a mark set in their foreheads because of their sighing and crying, their true unfeigned sorrow, for all the abominations done in the midst of Jerusalem, and most for the part themselves had borne in the mischief.

Again: it is a good sign when persons "who fear the Lord speak often one to another," not in shew, nor in lightness, but in a quiet, devout, charitable way; helping one another, if so be, to serve God in undutiful times, to keep up reverence in irreverent times. For such, we know, a Book of remembrance is opened before the Lord; He is even now remembering them for good; only let them go on in humble patience. A still more unquestionable sign is, to have misgivings about your own sins, along with your mournful sense of the sins of others, thoughts of trembling and astonishment at your own backslidings, like S. Paul's when just converted; these God

promises especially to note in His Book. Another hopeful sign is, if you have the heart, with blessed S. Clement and others, whether you be man or woman, to labour with such as St. Paul in his gospel-work. The Apostle, speaking of such, writes, “^atheir names are in the Book of Life.”

Along with this, however, must go (and it is the best sign of all) the power and habit of resisting and overcoming, by the grace of Christ, and in Christ’s name, all temptations to wilful sin; in our Lord’s word, to “overcome.” What should you say of yourselves, brethren, were one to come and ask you particularly about this,—such questions for example, as the following? Are you among people that *swear*? and do you find yourself able, by God’s grace, to overcome the strong temptation to swear yourself? especially if anger or other sudden passion arise? Could you truly say that this is your case? And again, you read and hear, probably, a great deal, at least in the newspapers, of the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, the grand and splendid and dazzling uses, to which worldly men convert the mammon of unrighteousness. Are you proof against all this? Can you, for Christ’s sake, pass from such reading or hearing, without grudging, without envy, without a sigh, to your own harder work, it may be, and scantier fare, saying in your hearts, “It is the Lord, the Lord Christ, let Him do what seemeth Him good?”

One more question I will ask, referring to one more sign or token of your being in the Book of Life: a sign or token, suggested by the services of

^a Phil. iv. 3.

this very day. Are you walking by faith or by sight? Are you, at this very time, in the way of unbelief, like the Jews? Or are you, like S. Thomas, striving to believe, but feeling it sometimes hard to do so? Or (best of all) are you, like the faithful Apostles and the rest, simply believing and trying to go on from strength to strength, from one good purpose and practice to another? enduring, as seeing Him Who is invisible? If such may be your true answer, happy are you; your names, please God, are now in the Book of Life; but pray, my brethren, and labour, above all things, for the spirit and grace of perseverance; and as you love your peace in this world and your hope in the next, turn away from all the whispers of the devil; from unbelieving talk, and from wisdom, falsely so called; and never, never “sit down in the seat of the scorner.”

SERMON VI.

MERCY AND JUDGEMENT.

2 S. PETER iii. 8.

“ One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

THERE are two great and dreadful days always present to the Almighty: the day of our Lord's Crucifixion, and the day of Judgement. To us, one of these days is passed, eighteen hundred years ago; the other is yet to come, we know not how soon. But to the Wonderful Eternal One both are alike present. His Name is, “I am that I am.” He is “the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.” Past, present and future, are all as one to Him. Therefore, as I said, both those astonishing times are to Him present, and present together. Now, and at all times, He beholds the glorious Sacrifice of His Son; His Hands and Feet freshly nailed to the Cross; His Head crowned with thorns; His Ears full of reproaches and mockery; His Side pierced with a spear, and the blood and water flowing from thence. Now and at all times He beholds also, as all other things to come, so especially that which shall happen on the last day of this world. The eye of God sees evermore Jesus Christ sitting on the Judgement seat, and the children of men, one and all, assembled before Him. He sees,

who will be on the right hand, who on the left. He sees on those who shall be saved the mark of Christ, on the others no such mark. And in one of these sights the Divine Eye, so to speak, has always respect unto the other. The Judge looks back to the Cross; else no flesh could be saved. The Cross, as some think, will be that "sign of the Son of Man in Heaven," which will "appear" before Him, as a standard of a king, in that unspeakable second coming. The Cross will be seen in the air, to give hope to the penitent and believing. The sign of the Cross will be seen on the brow of each baptized person, except it have been worn out, since his Baptism, by his own fault.

We are told also, that our Lord will appear with His Wounds; His glorious Body will still bear the marks made by His enemies in His crucified Body: the print of the nails in His Hands and Feet, the scar, where the spear ran into His Side. With those marks He was buried, with them He rose again, with them He went up into Heaven, with them He will shew Himself in the clouds: as we read, "^aThey shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced." Those glorious Wounds will be the life and light of all who have truly wept for them; all who have earnestly believed, and tried to live accordingly. All who have endeavoured to soothe, as it were, and assuage them by dutiful and humble and loving obedience. But they will be death and shame eternal to those who shall have dealt cruelly with them, opening them, as it were, afresh by their sins. Thus the Last Day will look back entirely to the Cross. And in

^a Zech. xii. 10.

like manner the Cross, when it was set up, looked forward throughout to the Last Day. The Lord in His sufferings gave token of His great Power. If He was taken and bound in the garden, it was not until He had shewn His persecutors what He could do, by striking them backward, and causing them to fall to the ground. If He was condemned, buffeted, spit upon, before the high priest, it was for declaring Himself the Son of Man, Whom they should see one day "at the Right Hand of Power." And we know what signs and wonders waited on His giving up the ghost. "The sun was darkened, the earth quaked, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies arose." Even to the eyes, it was a kind of rehearsal of what shall be, when He comes to be our Judge. For then too the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from Heaven; the earth shall tremble and move out of her place, and all the graves shall give up their dead. The tokens of Christ's power about the Cross point onward to the Day of Judgement; and the tokens of love about the Judgement-throne, point backwards to the day of the Crucifixion. Counting by years, the two may be ever so far apart: but in God's sight they are as one moment; they come close together. Let us too endeavour, by God's help, to bring and keep them together in *our* thoughts, now especially in this time of Advent, which is appointed for the serious remembrance of both the Comings of our Lord, the first to save, the other to judge. It is not well to think much of either of them by itself. For who could bear to look on to the dreadful day, without the remembrance of that merciful

and saving Passion, the virtue whereof is the only thing which can bring us safely through the terrors of judgement? And on the other hand, it is a dangerous thing, for beings so frail and easily tempted as we are, to meditate only on God's love manifested in Christ dying for us, without meditating on His wrath, manifested in Christ coming to judge us. The sound and safe way is, to join both together in our thoughts; like the Psalmist, who would have his "song be of mercy and judgement" at once.

Thus we shall know what to think of our sins, and how to get rid of them, neither abusing God's goodness, patience and longsuffering, nor yet (which God forbid) despairing of His mercy. Do we not see how long, how patiently, He bears with this wicked and unbelieving world, not destroying it, as it every moment deserves: not sweeping it into nothing? Or think you that Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbouring cities were the only places full of crying sins, calling down fire from Heaven? Alas! if the lusts of the flesh, sinfully indulged, are such sins, who can doubt that there are thousands of Christian towns, villages, families, whose cry goes daily up to Heaven, calling down the like vengeance? And yet the Almighty as yet bears with them all, bears with this whole wicked world, and does not sweep it away, as He might, "with one rough word." For His dear Son's sake, He still gives us a chance. As the cry of our sins goes up daily and hourly, so also does the cry of the most merciful Lamb of God, uttered, even as they were nailing Him to the Cross; "^b Father, forgive them;

^b S. Luke xxiii. 34.

for they know not what they do." Though the transgressions of men are heaped up, and make a high mountain reaching even to the clouds, yet still the Holy and Almighty One on the Cross shews Himself high above them all. You may see Him, if you will, you may hear Him, how He calls to you and to all men, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else." And you may understand and be sure, that it is His merciful pleading alone, which causes the just and pure God to bear so long with such uncleanness. He tells us so Himself in His parable of the barren fig-tree. All these years, all these Advents, has He gone on saying in the world's behalf, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I have made it My gracious offers again, and if it bear fruit well: if not, after that Thou shalt take it away."

All these years, all these Advents, Christ has gone on thus graciously pleading for our sins in particular, since the day that we first could commit sin. The Cross has been lifted up in our sight, and we have been sinning under it. As yet we are spared for its sake. But we shall not be spared always, and our end will but be the more fearful at last, if we make His longsuffering an excuse and handle for sin, whereas He meant that it should lead us to repentance.

Consider, too, that the shadow of the Cross is on other men's sins also; on the sins of those who vex and illtreat you, as well as on your own sins; and that, for its sake, the Judge as yet bears with the one as well as with the other. Say this within your-

self, whenever you are ill-used: say in your heart, "to be sure it is very provoking; but Almighty God for Christ's sake bears with it; then why should not I? or rather, how can I help bearing with it, who have such a load of sins of my own to be endured?"

Add this further thought, that our blessed Lord had all these sins, both our's and their's, every one of them, in His mind when He suffered. They were present to His Divine Soul, with all their horrors, all their loathsome and shameful particulars, even then when He shed His Blood. He knew and considered at that moment every one of the sad instances, in which we so madly have preferred our own will and lust to His known pleasure and command, even though His Spirit brought it to our minds at the time. He knew how the thief would reach forth his hand to his neighbour's goods, and how His restraining grace would whisper at the very moment, "Thou shalt not steal," and yet, in contempt of that heavenly whisper, the sinner would go on and the deed would be done. He knew how those unhappy sinners who let their eyes wander at will, betraying them into all sorts of evil fancies, would be warned by Him, and would remember His warning, and would yet too often give way to that miserable temptation; and so "lust" would "conceive and bring forth sin, and sin, being finished, would bring forth death;" that is, they would fall into so many deadly sins, sins which would separate them from Him, Who is their true life. He knew it all beforehand, and yet He died for it. Try and bring the thought home, each one to himself: He knew of this or that sin, which I should most grievously commit:

He knew it in all its horror, yet He died for it; so great, so exceeding, so infinite, was His love of us sinners. He knows, and knew at the time, whether or no that sin will stand against me in His Book at the Last Day. God grant that it may not do so; but that it may not, surely I must make answer to His gracious calls. I must seek the cure of my sins, one by one, by serious confession, repentance and amendment. Above all, I must beseech the blessed and merciful Lord Jesus to fill my heart with His love; else it never can be "a broken and a contrite heart;" and then I never can be forgiven. For a contrite heart is one which is in grief because He is offended Who loves us. Mere anguish for dread of punishment is another thing; there is no promise of forgiveness to that; that is what Cain felt, and Judas, and the lost spirits. But let us try to fix our minds more and more on our Lord's unspeakable love, in dying even for these sins of ours, which He foreknew. Surely we shall be ashamed to go on vexing Him, though we were never so sure of pardon; surely by degrees we shall learn some little of that feeling, with which the lost son regarded his affectionate father. When we can say heartily as he did, "I am not worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thine hired servants;" then it may be hoped, the blessed angels will begin rejoicing in our repentance, though we may not know it ourselves.

Thus, by considering how all of us were present to our Lord's mind in His Passion, we may get help to true contrition of heart; and what can a sinner here ask more?

And not in men's sins only, but in all their troubles, there is unspeakable comfort for those who truly love our Saviour, in regarding Him as always present, always present on His Cross. "Upon this I depend," says a holy writer, "when my heart is in heaviness." We may think of it somewhat in this way. Let the worst come to the worst; let all counsel, all help, all pity, seem to have forsaken a man here on earth, so that to the eye of sense he is utterly forlorn and desolate, what would such an one do, were he to be told that our Lord was even now in his neighbourhood, just lifted up on the Cross, and offering to draw all men unto Him? Would he not naturally, if he had faith, make haste and come to Christ, as one weary and heavy laden, to whom rest had been graciously offered? Would he not come full of prayer, pouring out all his griefs into that mild and merciful ear? as those did, who, in our Lord's lifetime, brought such as were sick of divers diseases and torments, and besought Him, that they might touch if it were but the hem of His garment? This is what a forlorn person would surely do, if, having any faith, he were to be told that our Blessed Saviour, crucified for us, was near at hand. Now then, whoever we are, He tells us that He *is* near at hand. You have but to lift up your eyes and look, and behold Jesus Christ visibly set forth, crucified among you. He is in His Church; He is in His Scriptures; He is in your prayers; He is most especially in His Sacraments. Bring all your troubles to Him, to be cured, if such be His Will; if not, at least to be sanctified and turned to good: and be sure you will not bring them in vain.

And as the constant presence of the Passion may soothe your sorrows, so may your joys be chastened by the consideration of the Day of Judgement, as being also, in God's account, present. While we thankfully take the mercies which God gives us so richly to enjoy, yet let us say to ourselves not seldom, "a The time is short:" let us be careful that our mere refreshments do not fill our hearts: let us see to it, that all of them be such, as that we need not fear, though judgement overtook us in the midst of them.

Whether in sorrow or in joy, there is one part of our days especially, which may well remind us of the Great Day: I mean when we examine ourselves before we lie down to rest. Well will it be for us, when we have got into a way of doing this seriously and thoroughly, as knowing that Day to be, in God's account, always present, and even in men's account we know not how near. How deep and searching will be our questions then; how full of grave anxiety our watching of ourselves! how eager, hearty, and persevering our prayers and resolutions, never to forsake God nor be forsaken of Him! how earnest our longing to see His Face with joy!

Self-examination should make the Last Day present to us, and Holy Communion, the day of Christ's Passion. That Service is so framed, that if we thoughtfully use it, it may well help us to a saving knowledge of our Lord's Sufferings, each part of them in its order. Come to Christ's altar, then, all you who have any true love of Christ, that you may see, and know, and feel, more and more perfectly at

^a 1 Cor. vii. 29.

what a dear cost you were saved,—what that Cross is, which we hope will save you, by His mercy, in the Day of Judgement.

He who shall thus go on, really rehearsing and remembering his Lord's two Comings, in his daily self-examinations, and regular Communions; and who, being thereby kept in godly fear, strives to purify himself from all sin;—he may hope that the remembrance of the Passion will help him, when the Judgement is come: when we shall all come to understand, how a thousand years may be as one day; the whole world and all our lives in it, gathered up, as it were in one point, and that point again spreading out into Eternity.

“^e The Lord grant unto us, that we may find mercy of the Lord in that Day.”

^e 2 Tim. i. 18.

SERMON VII.

ONCE FOR ALL.

HEB. ix. 27.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement.”

ALL men must die. Sooner or later, they must come to an end of their lives here. When we have seen the day and night, the evening and the morning, a few more times; when we have had a little more experience of waking up, putting on our clothes, doing our work or our play, taking our meals, and lying down to rest again; after a few more times, I say, if not even sooner than that, we shall come to an end of it all; our souls will be parted from our bodies, and we shall be altogether in a new state of things, of which we have no experience at all. And this is appointed for us; both the thing itself and the time. We are certain of the thing, because God has told us of it, and has shewn us that so it must be, by the deaths of all that have gone before us. We know we must die, only we know not the time, when.

Here some one may say in his heart, “Yes, of course we know we must die: all but quite little children know it: what is the use of getting up into

a pulpit to tell us such a thing as that?" Alas, my brethren, our knowing it so well is a great part of the reason, why we need so continually to be put in mind of it. Our knowing about death so well, does but make it the more necessary, that a great deal should be said to us about it; unless we minded it more than we do. If we were like little children, who cannot yet look forward to death, then such warnings would be idle; but now, since we know it must come, yet foolishly desire to think of it as little as we can, he plainly is our best friend, who can most effectually persuade us to turn our meditations that way; that we may not be caught unprepared through our own fault.

Do not then shut your ears and your hearts, when you are told you are going to die, as if you knew it well enough before; but reflect, if it be but on this one circumstance about it;—an astonishing circumstance, when we come to consider it:—that although all men are perfectly aware that they must one day die, yet not one of us all knows what it really is to die. We know a good deal about the outward dress and appearance of death; how sad it is to be near, and see it coming on; how fearful to be present, when it actually takes place; how it changes the whole outward seeming, all the limbs and features of a man, and takes away all the bodily power, be it much or little, which sickness and decay had left. We know something of the parting breath, the fixed eye, the cold lips, the stiffening limbs, and of the melancholy change which follows after; but these are but the outward signs and token of death: we may know all about them, and yet not know what

it really is to die. We say indeed, and we say truly, that death is the separation of soul and body; but who can tell us what that is? or how it makes itself felt, both by soul and body, at the time? who can give us an account of it? Not one.

Now this, as I said, is an astonishing thought: that after the experience of so many ages, the whole time since Adam, nearly six thousand years at least, the whole world should be just as ignorant of this great thing, what death is, what it really is, to die, as it was presently after the first man had died. One after another, so many hundred millions have been born, and have lived their time here so long as it pleased God, and then have sunk into their graves, and not one of them all has known (so far as we are aware) at all better than another, what the awful change is, to which we are all in turn approaching. They have, none of them, known it, until it actually came on, and then each one of them, man, woman and child, knew it at once. In a moment the veil was drawn up, and the great secret made plain. Let us consider it a little in regard of those whom we ourselves have known. Recollect the last near friend, kinsman or neighbour, whoever he was, whom it pleased God to separate from you. As long as he was here, he was like the rest; he went in and out among us; he had his earthly and bodily cares: pain and ease, rest and weariness, concerned him (if he had his senses) to the very moment of his death; he looked forward indeed (so we will hope) to the great change with faith and penitence, but still it was a *secret* to him: to the last moment, as far as we can tell, he knew no more what it really is, than we did.

But it came; and in one moment he knows it all. *We* may but dimly imagine; but he knows it. We could feel for him and with him in the kind of suffering which he endured, down to the instant when he gave up the ghost: but now we hardly know how to feel. We can but bow ourselves down and say; he is dead: he is gone to God: God knows how it was with him, in that great and sudden change: we do not know, we can only hope and imagine. There seems something especially awful in this: that those who, a few hours ago were perhaps as one with us, and told us, in a manner, every thought of their hearts, that is fit for one friend to tell another, are now, in a moment, put in possession of the greatest and most interesting secret in the whole world, and yet they can tell us nothing of it. The most ignorant heathen, who is dead, knows so far more than the most advanced Christian living; the little infant, who just passed from the womb to the grave, is wiser in this, than all the learned and studious of all ages put together. The infant has come to know, what death is; which none of them ever did or could tell. Not even those who at sundry times have been miraculously called back from the grave, such as Lazarus, the widow's son, and others, were able, (that we are told) to remember themselves, or to instruct others, what kind of a change had passed over them when they died. God Almighty, for His own wise and merciful purposes, has hidden that one thing from us: He has kept the veil drawn over it. He has caused us indeed all naturally to shrink from it: there are many tokens, as if a sore agony and trial attended it, at least in almost all cases; still no man

can say for certain ; it may be easier, it may be far fuller of anguish, than our fancies are used to represent it. We know not now, but many of those dear to us know ; and we shall very soon know, ourselves. No one can say whose turn will come next, nor how soon. But, whenever it is, then we too shall know the great secret, and those whom we leave behind will be wondering how it has been with us : and so on continually, until each man's own turn is come. One by one, we are called, as it were, out of a great company of people, to enter into a thick cloud, after which we are seen no more. Every one knows that, sooner or later, his turn will come : but he cannot know when, nor how it will be with him, as he enters into that cloud.

So far, we are very ignorant. But our gracious God has taught us one thing more, which ought to make all the difference to us. Though we cannot at all say, what the parting of soul and body is ; what kind of an hour the hour of death will be ; yet we do know for certain, that it will come but once, and that after it will be judgement. It will come but once, once for all. The soul and body which shall be parted then, after having been on their trial together, so long as it pleased God, in this lower world, will indeed come together again, but it will be not to try but to pass sentence on them. They will live again, but not on their trial. It will be all punishment or all mercy. There will be no returning to earth, to purify that which had made itself unclean, and had died before it was effectually cleansed by the waters of repentance and the Blood of the Cross.

Once for all ! Remember that word. Is it not a

very serious word, even in things pertaining to this life? for good or for evil? e. g. when people are married, it is *once for all*: they cannot be, as they had been before. When a man is ordained, he is made a Priest *once for all*: he cannot become an ordinary person again. The mark is on him, to his shame or his credit, for the whole of his after-life. So when people are dissatisfied with their servants or scholars, and call them to them, and say, "This once more I will try you, but if you transgress again I will do so no more; the next thing I do will be *once for all*." all men understand that this is the last trial; no more liberties must be taken: if this fail, there must be an entire separation.

These are common and every day things, yet in some sort they are figures and tokens of the last and most dreadful of all things, the end of sinners' trial, and the beginning of judgement. They remind us that death must soon come, and that, when he comes, it will be *once for all*. There is no device, nor counsel, nor wisdom: no change, no conversion, no repentance, in the grave, towards which we are hastening. All on this side of it is trial; all on the other side will be judgement. There will be no living over again such a life as we live here, and coming a second time to death: no second chance, over and above what we have now. If we fail then, we have failed for ever: if we prosper then, we have prospered for ever. All those who have gone before, from Abel to him who died (if so it happened) a minute ago, are now in that world of judgement: every one of them has failed or prospered for ever. Which of the two their lot is, we know not yet; ex-

cept indeed with regard to a few highly favoured ones, the Saints of God, on whom His seal was especially set. But generally speaking, as it is a secret to us, what death really is, so is the condition of each several dead person a secret to us also.

To us it is a secret. But the departed themselves, as we may judge from Holy Scripture, know it at once, for certain. Their judgement is in some sense immediate. For so our Lord represents it in His account of the rich man and Lazarus. As soon as ever the rich man's body was buried, we read of his lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torments, and seeing Lazarus already in Abraham's bosom. And S. Paul longed to depart and to be with Christ; and S. John heard a voice from Heaven, saying, "^aBlessed are the dead which die in the Lord." The solemn declaration indeed of this judgement, the full curse and blessing of it, will not come on until the Last great Day, when we shall all rise and be judged together, our bodies as well as our souls; but the earnest and sure foretaste of that final doom will open upon us, the moment our eyes are sealed in death. It *has* opened on those who are gone. *They* in a manner see their way before them, without chance of mistake, through all Eternity. Yesterday, perhaps, they were as we are, now hoping, now fearing, not knowing well what to think of themselves: or, more sorrowful yet to think of, they cared little or nothing about that world of judgement, which, as they now see, was so very near them.

Yesterday they were in doubt or in carelessness: now their eyes are fully opened; they are aware how

^a Rev. xiv. 13.

they stand with God, and they can think of nothing else. What is it to them, now, whether such and such a quantity of money be at their disposal or no; whether men are praising or blaming them; whether or no they have the means of bodily enjoyment and diversion? what are meat, drink and pleasures, what are gains and success in the world to them now? And yesterday perhaps these matters seemed every thing to them. But now, in one moment of death, all *that* is gone by, and they are henceforth swallowed up wholly in most miserable or most transporting thought: “^bThis God is our God for ever and ever.” or, “He is turned to be our enemy, and will be against us for ever.”

My brethren, I wish every one of us could but think and meditate steadily, were it only for one quarter of an hour; nay, I will say, only for five minutes together, on this amazing, overwhelming condition, certainly prepared for every one of us; the condition of knowing to an absolute certainty, whether God Almighty will be our friend or our enemy for ever. How do we look on, sometimes, when we have asked for any favour, to the day or hour, on which an answer has been promised us! How earnestly do we think with ourselves, By such a time we shall know our fate. How anxiously do prisoners and friends of prisoners forecast the moment of their trial, when once the time is appointed. How often do they imagine with themselves, how it will be with them, should the verdict be this way or that! Now we are as prisoners on our trial: on our trial for many many sins: we, if we have

^b Ps. xlviii. 14.

not lived quite ungodly, have been years and years beseeching Christ for this great favour, that He will be merciful to us in Eternity. And the moment we die, the verdict will be pronounced in our hearing: Christ will give us to understand, whether our prayers are accepted or no. Surely, if we have any belief at all, we must often, very often, meditate on that moment: and if we earnestly muse on it, though for ever so short a time, and do not drive away the recollection by wilful sin, it must return before long to our minds and memories; it must return again and again; it must make us more or less uneasy, until we may reasonably hope that we are in a way of preparation for it. O my brethren, encourage this uneasiness; do not dismiss these anxious, fearful thoughts; they are the very touch of the merciful Comforter, the Hand of God laid gently upon you, to check you in your evil ways, and turn your faces towards Heaven. Make a rule, during this one Advent season at least, every day for some short time to muse earnestly on death and judgement, how surely you must soon come to both. Make a rule to meditate on this for some short time, say three minutes, in the course of every day: e. g. just before your evening prayers. Consider well with yourself, every night of your life, that you must die soon, and that you can die but once. You never can have more than just that one chance. If you are not on God's side heartily before then, you cannot join Him afterwards. The Angels who fell, Satan and the rest, had not even that one chance: you are more favoured than they, not surely for any desert of yours, but only of God's great unspeakable mys-

terious pity. When they had sinned, He cast them out at once: for you, He spared not His only-begotten Son. O throw not His mercy away; have pity on your own souls; have pity on the wounds of your Saviour; think what it will be, when you are once for all dead, when judgement has really begun, to say to yourselves, "I was warned, but I would not hear; the Saviour stood at the door and knocked, but I would not open and let Him in." And think on the other hand, what joy it will be, what humble thankfulness for ever and ever, when a man shall awake on the other side of death, and find that he is saved, because he listened to warnings. Think of *Once for all*: think of Eternity: think of the horror of being too late.

Some of us are old; some out of health; the changes which go before death have passed more or less upon very many of us. Whether we consider it ourselves or no, those who are younger see plainly that we are far advanced on our road; we shall soon be at that point, which is appointed for us to pass once for all: and after that, all will be judgement!

And you, my brethren who are younger, and perhaps are saying of us elder ones, "Were I as old as such and such a person, I would set about preparing in earnest:" make sure that, if you use yourselves to disregard these warnings now, you will be very unlikely to profit by them in elder years. And who has promised you that you shall come to those years? And you know in your hearts, that if you come to repent then, you will bitterly regret not having repented now.

If indeed looking on would only shew us our misery

and danger, to warn men of death and judgement, however true, might seem merely useless and unkind. But now the same light from Heaven, which shews us our danger, shews us also the way to escape. As surely as we are to die, Christ has died for us; Christ has been "once for all offered, to bear the sins of many," of all: and as surely as we are to be judged, "to them that look for Him He will appear the second time, without sin"—forgetting it all, "casting it all behind His back," blotting it out of His gracious Book—He will appear to them without sin, and it will be their everlasting Salvation.

The Saved will be there, and the Lost: on which side shall we be?

SERMON VIII.

THE END OF ALL THINGS.

EZEK. vii. 2, 3.

“Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send Mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways.”

WE speak familiarly of the Last Day, when we are asked questions about it; it comes almost naturally into the mouths even of quite young children. But it is one thing to speak of it, another to think earnestly of it; and I could wish now in all seriousness to ask those who hear me, one by one, “Have you earnestly thought on what is meant by this saying, The Last Day?” It means the last time the sun will rise over this wonderful and various world; the last time any of the children of men will rise up and go about their employments, and take their bodily refreshment as they have been used to do; the last time clothes will be worn, meals taken, conversations held, trades and professions exercised; the last time flowers will bloom, waters flow, animals move about, birds sing, the sea and the waves roar. All this has gone on now for many thousand years,

and we lie down and rise up, not doubting but it will yet go on. To-morrow, we take it as a matter of course, will be as this day; and yet we know for certain by God's word, that it will not always be so. Sooner or later a day will come, after which there will be no morrow, but all things will be changed for ever. The end; the world's end; the end of all things; the time of the end; we are sure it will be; we are sure it will soon be; yet how hard, how very hard, do we find it, to realize the thought of it, and get it fully into our mind's eye. We know it, but we scarcely know how to put our minds to it. On every side we see and hear things which ought to put us in mind of it; which God intended for that purpose; yet on the other hand we are every moment tempted to forget it, and to behave as if it would never come.

In one sense, I say, there is no moment, in which we are not reminded of the Last Great Day. For all things around us, and we ourselves, are in a continual flow and change; like a stream of water, which can never be still for an instant. Thus, day is continually passing into night, and night again into day; spring, summer, autumn, winter, are constantly following each other: as the days, hours, minutes pass away. We feel that they are gone for ever, and that we shall never see them again. The very outward appearance of things changes, by the growth of trees, the decay of buildings, and the like; and we feel in ourselves, and see in others, that neither we nor any of our brethren can possibly continue in one stay. In these and in other ways we are made to feel continually, how true those words of the

Prayer Book are, "In the midst of life we are in death." Each day and hour is, so far, a preparation for the last day and hour, in that each day and hour takes away from us something or other which we never shall see again. So far, the notion of coming to an end ought to be very familiar to us; and in books and in conversation it *is* very familiar. All confess and own it; but very few seem really to have it brought home to their minds. Very few use themselves to think of it, and to help themselves by it, as they might, in the temptations and trials of their life. On the contrary, many so contrive to forget it, that the Psalmist says of them, "They think that their houses shall continue for ever, and that their dwelling-places shall endure from one generation to another." Observe, he does not say, "they think that themselves, their own life and being, will continue here for ever." They are not quite so blind and senseless as that; but they do expect their dwelling-places and their families to endure; as though, while the things of earth passed away, the earth itself might remain: as though generations indeed should perish one after another, but the race of man should never fail, nor ever cease to dwell in this world, man's appointed home. Thus, even while they remember and provide in some sense for their own death, they look on to the continuance of their families and posterity, as though this state of things were to be positively eternal; they are worldly-minded for those who come after them, if not for themselves: and they are tempted to be so, by observing how regularly the providence of God brings

^a Ps. xlix. 11. P. B.

back the same things again, when they seem to have quite departed. As we read in the Book of Ecclesiastes, “^b One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.” “All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full: unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” So that men are inclined to say to themselves, as it is written presently after, “^c The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done.” Things go on so regularly, that we can scarcely help feeling and behaving as if they would go on for ever. And so we are sure it will be, as long as this world shall last. For God has given us an express promise, “^d while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” In the faith of that merciful promise we may go on and provide for ourselves and others in this present world; yet never at any time forgetting, that all this will be but for a time, for a very short time, compared with what will come after. While the earth remaineth, such will be the order of things: but the earth will not remain for ever: and this is what we are now to fix our minds upon.

The Prophet gave the like warning to the Jewish people, when he saw them going on in their sins, abusing God’s mercy and long-suffering; as though, because their city and temple had lasted so many

^b Eccles. i. 4, 5, 7.

^c Ib. 9.

^d Gen. viii. 22.

hundred years, therefore it would last on, and God would not really fulfil His own threatenings. To drive away such foolish and wicked imaginations, the Lord teaches His Prophet to say, “an end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee”—“an end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold it is come.” They were so used to have things proceed orderly in their course, that they could not believe, could not bring their minds to receive it, that now at last the day is come, in which there will be an end of the solemn services of the temple, and of the ordinary way in which the land was governed, and all manner of public business carried on in it. They had risen up in the morning, and all things seemed as they had been. They could not imagine, how before night all should have been entirely swept away by the power of the king of Babylon. Therefore he tells them again and again, “an end is come; the end is come.” This awful word, the End, is made to ring loudly in their ears; that they may not be able to help noticing it, and setting themselves, before it is too late, to prepare for that awful hour, which they cannot avoid.

And I would it might ring in our ears, in our hearts and understandings also: that we might attend to it in good time. Every year, when Advent comes, the warning is repeated more awefully than in the last Advent; more awefully, by how much the time is nearer. And this is the warning: that before very long a day will arise upon the earth, different from all other days that have ever been,

^c Ezek. vii. 2, 3, 6.

since it was created: a day in which men will say one to another, "an end, the end is come, now is the end come upon us; behold it is come." An end, not of this or that city or kingdom, not of this or that portion of the life of man on the earth, but of all cities and kingdoms together, of man's whole earthly life. The whole scheme and order of things, such as we now see it, will be swept away—as a dream is swept away from a man's mind when he awaketh—the world around us, and all that we care for, in it. Men will get up in the morning as usual, but before night they will be aware, that all these things are at an end, that there never more will be night and morning, such as they have been used to. This beautiful and glorious world with all its fair and noble shew of creatures, the mountains and hills, the trees and plants, the fields and woods, and all the works of men on it, cities and villages, farms and gardens, and whatever else we see around us; what will become of it? It will burn under our feet; the fire of God will break out and consume it all; none will be left. So we read in Scripture over and over: "†The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Some of us may have seen occasionally, and known a little of the horror of a great fire; what a fearful, confounding thing it is, when it begins to rage but only in a single house. Imagine then what it will be to see the whole world on fire, and no escape, no remedy, but

for those who have so lived, that Christ shall count them worthy to be caught up in the clouds, to meet Him in the air, and to be with Him for ever.

Consider also how, together with this outward and visible world, the affairs and employments and pleasures which belong to it will pass quite entirely away. No more sleeping and waking; no more eating and drinking; no more work and rest; no more buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage: no more loss and gain, no more planning and scheming. The day before, these things took up the hearts of thousands and of millions; they thought of nothing else from morning to night; and now, what is become of them all? They have perished as if they had never been; they are less than nothing, and vanity, except so far as they influence our condition in the eternal world by the good or bad use we have made of them. Of course too, all our amusements and enjoyments, innocent enough perhaps in themselves, but too apt to take entire possession of our hearts, these also will pass away, and how foolish will then seem all our inordinate care and anxiety about them. All the various kinds of learning and wisdom and skill, which many take such pleasure in, and on which they so pride themselves; nay more, all the ties of blood, of neighbourhood and of friendship, which make up so much of the comfort and refreshment of our lives, all will be done away and clean gone for ever: there will be no more comfort nor joy in any of them, if we have not turned them to the true good of our souls. And there is another thought, a very serious one indeed. No doubt many persons, many men women and

children will arise, in the morning of that Last Day, with a sort of good wishes and good purposes in their minds; some to begin their repentance, some to perfect it: to attend to this or that duty which they have neglected; to break themselves now at last of some old and bad habit; to reconcile themselves with some neighbour whom they have offended; to prepare for some holy duty which they have slighted; to confess some fault which they have denied; to fulfil some engagement which they have put off; to deny themselves some pleasure, which they know to be dangerous, or to begin some exercise which they know will do them good. Men will get up in the morning with good intentions of this kind, but the Last Day will put an end to them all: an end to all their penitential ways and purposes. If they have not been heartily embraced before, all then will be too late. The foolish virgins will go out with their lamps, but it will be too late then to get oil: the unprofitable servant will be looking after his talent, but there will not be time to get it out of the earth: the unworthy guest will be for washing his garment, but those few hours will never get out the stains. O my brethren, this is a sad thought for us all. For which of us has not upon his conscience many an unfruitful good intention, many a godly motion of the Holy Spirit slighted and unimproved, through slothfulness or some worse reason? It is a sad and fearful thought for us all, to look on to the hour when good intentions will all be too late: but it is saddest for those who are wilfully putting off the great work of repentance and conversion; who have never yet turned to God in earnest, but in some

sense are continually intending to do so. What will they do, when God shall visit them? When the great trumpet shall sound, and they shall be found still unprepared; still intending to amend and still putting it off; when the sudden and dreadful end shall come, as of all other worldly things, so also of their vain and empty excuses?

It may be that none of us who are now living will be still alive on the earth when that day comes. But we shall not so escape its terrors. For it will raise us out of our graves; and, such as we were in respect of true repentance when we lay down there, such shall we be found when we rise up to judgment. If we do not live till the Last Day, yet death, whenever it comes, will put an end to our present being, as far as each one of us is concerned. The moment of the soul's departing from the body will be the end, the Last Day, the great change of life and being, to each one in particular. In the twinkling of an eye, these present things will be nothing at all to us, and the eternal things will be all in all. So it has proved with all those, one after another, who have given up the ghost, from Adam's time even until now. A few years, perhaps a few days or hours, and so it will be with every one of us.

The awful change awaits us all: it is our Father's will, and we cannot alter it. We may indeed, if we are so minded, turn away our thoughts from it. We may wilfully forget, that there will be an end of all things. We may drown the thought of it, in the foolish cares and pleasures of the world. But what is the use of so driving it out of our minds? It will come just as soon, and a great deal the more

terribly. It will watch for us, if we do not watch for it. Who knows how soon it may be here? Who knows how soon he may be awakened, the next time he falls asleep, by such a cry as the Prophet sounds in the ears of the people of Israel? “^g The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land:” —that is, the last awful morning: “the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains.” Not a mere echo, which startles people and does no more harm: but this is trouble and alarm indeed: this is “^h an evil, an only evil:” this is the Lord accomplishing His anger, not sparing nor pitying any, but those only who have repented and found pardon in Jesus Christ. Alas for all them who in that morning will have to open their eyes unwillingly and go forth to meet their Judge! but joy and gladness to all those, who shall have laid themselves down the night before with clean and prepared hearts. That which is all horror to the one will be most sweet and pleasant to the other. To both it will be the Last Day, the day of the end: but in ways how unspeakably different! To the wicked it will be the end of their vain hopes and transient enjoyments, their flashes of pride and pleasure, their empty and miserable methods of excusing themselves for sin. To the righteous it will be the end of their struggles, their imperfections and misgivings, their wanderings in prayer, and all their bitter feelings in the sense of their unworthiness. To both it will be an end, and to both an eternal beginning. And we ourselves, one and all, shall be of the number. As surely as we rose up this morn-

^g Ezek. vii. 7.^h Ib. 5.

ing, so surely will that last morning come upon us : and as it will find us, such we shall remain for ever. Whatever we have been in times past, now at least let us begin preparing ourselves for that dreadful day. Of all the things we do here, such holy preparation alone will tell to our good for ever. As the holy Psalmist teaches, “ⁱ I see that all things come to an end, but Thy commandment is exceeding broad;” so broad and vast that whoso keepeth it shall go forward therein to all Eternity.

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 96.

SERMON IX.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. I.

THE RESURRECTION, ALL MIRACLES IN ONE.

ISA. XXXV. 5, 6.

“ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”

WE are come together, my brethren, at this rather unusual time, because it is the Advent season, and we must all do what we can to prepare ourselves and one another for the Coming of our Lord. He will very soon be here, that is quite certain, and He has given us all notice. Every time the clock strikes, it is as if we heard Him say, “Now I shall be with you, in your sight, by one hour sooner.” Every pulse that we feel beating in our veins, it is as if we felt Him within us, silently but surely, giving us a sign, that He is nearer to us than He was, by one moment at least. Every hour, every moment, we may, if we will, do something towards preparing ourselves to meet Him. Why should we cast away His goodness, which gives us so much time? And why should we throw away our own

souls, our precious souls, which, if ever lost, never can be recovered, and which will most assuredly be lost, if we refuse to take His warnings?

One good step towards preparing ourselves will be, if we seriously try to imagine, how it will be in that day; if we draw in our minds the most exact picture we can of our Lord coming to judge us. For instance, if ever we lie awake in the night, surely it would be profitable to many of us, if instead of musing on the work or the diversion, which we expect to have on the morrow, we used ourselves to meditate on what we have learned from the Bible concerning the last Day, and our own part in it. Say to yourselves, "Suppose the day come, the Judge on His throne, and the world burning under our feet; what would be my feelings then? and what should I have to say for myself?" When a thought of that day comes into your mind at your leisure time, by no means dismiss it, I beseech you; by no means let it go: but turn it over and over, and dwell upon it; follow it on; it will be a good thought, if it draw your minds away from this short world, and draw them towards that world which will last for ever. Follow it on; for it is Christ's messenger, or rather it is Christ Himself knocking at the door, and offering to shew you the only right way, and to help you along it.

I am now going to mention to you one such thought, in the hope that some at least will be serious enough to take it home with them, and think of it to-night before they go to sleep, and also during the night, if they should lie awake. And why not also to-morrow and the next day, at what we call

odd times, while they are sitting quiet, or while they are so employed, that they may think of what they please. The thought which I now propose to you is this. Many of us have perhaps imagined before now, when we have been reading the Scriptures, or hearing them read, "What if we could ourselves see a miracle? What if God permitted these eyes of ours to rest on some of those mighty works which the Gospels tell us of? What if we could see a blind man brought to Christ and receiving sight in a moment? or a deaf man made able to hear? or a lame man, on a sudden, made sound and strong upon his feet? or a leper cleansed all at once from his foul disease? or a man possessed with a devil restored to his senses? or a dead man raised to life? or a sudden darkness come over the whole world? or fire fall from Heaven upon some very wicked place?" Surely, we may have said to ourselves, "If we saw a miracle, it would make a great difference to us;" or if we knew that we should see a miracle to-morrow, do you not suppose that we should be apt to think a great deal of it? Should we not wonder beforehand, how it would be, and if the miracle were to be wrought on ourselves, would there not be a deep mixture of fear and hope with our wonder?

Consider then, (for it is a certain truth) that you will be present at the Day of Judgement, and then you will see, as it were, all miracles in one. You have read of the flood of water in Noah's time, how it overflowed all the earth; then you will see the more fearful flood of fire, how it will break out, and wrap in itself one thing after another, until all is

melted with fervent heat: both the works of man, the houses, ships, and all goods; and the more immediate works of God; the trees, mountains, rivers and the like; the fire of that Day will burn them all, and we shall be there to see it. You have read of the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah; *then* you will see (God grant we may not feel) how He will rain upon all sinners "^asnakes from heaven, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest," and it will be "their portion to drink" for evermore. You have read of the ruin of Babylon, of the plagues of Egypt, of the sun and moon stayed in the heavens, until Joshua had punished the Canaanites: bye and bye, you will see the same sun darkened, and the moon refusing to give her light, and all the scourges of God falling together on the head of that wicked generation.

And over and above all these, which are miracles of power, the visible terrors of the Lord, you will be witnesses in that day of all our Lord's miracles of love; your eyes shall behold them, and not another: e. g., he that is now blind, incurably blind in this world, shall then have his eyes opened. Now, day and night are almost all one to him; he goes about mourning and seeking some one to lead him by the hand; but in that day the light of the Lord will all at once dawn upon him: and if he be found worthy, the saying of the Prophet will be fulfilled in him; his "^beyes shall behold the King in His beauty, they shall see the land which is very far off." What a thought is this, for any poor blind man, or for any one of us, so far as he feels his sight imperfect, and that imperfection coming more and

^a Ps. xi. 7.

^b Isa. xxxiii. 17.

more on by age, that if he die in God's favour and fear, the dark and dismal feeling will be entirely and for ever gone, and he shall actually see Jesus Christ: see His gracious countenance turned towards him with looks of love, see the glory of Almighty God, and the Saints and Angels around the throne of Judgement; see, in one moment, more of beauty and wonder, than the sharpest sight in this world could have shewn him in hundreds of years. Think of the joy of that blind Bartimeus, how he looked up to Jesus when the words were spoken, "Receive thy sight." But it is nothing to the joy of those who, having been blind here, shall receive their sight from the same Jesus at His Coming, shall open their eyes for the first time, not on the sun, moon and stars, but on His merciful Countenance.

Again, there are many among us, who suffer more or less from deafness; who are sometimes even tempted to repine, because they cannot perceive the good and pleasant words and sounds, wherein others, they know, take so much delight; to whom the Church is a dull place, and home also, through their being so hard of hearing. Let these also think how in that day, "the ears of the deaf will be unstopped." Music is nothing to them, or worse than nothing; mere confusion; but then Christ will say with power, "be opened," and they shall hear the music of angels, and, what is far more, they shall hear the sweet and gracious voice of the Son of God, the Friend of sinners and Saviour of the world, saying, "Come, ye blessed of My Father." Will it not then, think you, be found worth while to have

waited patiently a few years, coming, if so perchance it were, to Churches which one could not see, and attending on prayers and lessons which one could not hear, because one loved to be as near God as one could? Will it not be a rich reward then, to look out of one's darkened eyes on the beaming Countenance of our Saviour, and to discern with one's dull and sealed ears the tones of His eternal Absolution? Fear not to think of it, my brethren; fear not to think of it, again and again. For it is more, far more than a pleasant dream, a sweet and soothing imagination; it is a real and true purpose of God, certain to be fulfilled in every blind and deaf person who does not wilfully cast it away.

How distressing again is the condition of the lame and the palsied! how grievous to be struck down as so many are, in a moment, either by some outward accident, a fall, the slipping of an edged tool, or the like; or by some inward benumbing disease; to lie helpless, and have no feeling in many of your limbs, except by pain; but then, hear what the Gospel says, "Then (when Christ cometh) the lame man shall leap as an hart." "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." It was so in a few cases, by way of sample, when He came the first time. Cripples, who never had walked, began to walk and leap and praise God, at the touch of Him and His Apostles; but, in that day of universal judgement and healing, it will be the case of all who are found in faith. Their infirmities, every one of them, will pass away in one moment: and with perfect and strong bodies, and souls for ever cheered and comforted, they will take

their place among His approved servants: and whereas, here, it often came across them how they were made useless and in a manner laid by, and seemed as if they could do nothing for God, then they will understand, once for all, to their endless comfort, that, in patiently suffering, they were doing a great deal for Him.

Think again of those who suffer by diseases, more or less shocking and loathsome, such as was the plague of leprosy among the Jews, such as are many of those afflictive complaints, which even now visit the children of men, in consequence of their first father's sin. Think what a joy, what a relief to be at once delivered from such a complaint, and in perfect purity and cleanness of body and mind, to find one's self standing with those who "shall walk with Christ in white," being made worthy of Him. The leper cleansed, and falling at Jesus' feet, and giving Him thanks with a loud voice, was but rehearsing what all lepers, and persons with sad and loathsome complaints will do, if they are so happy as to be cured and forgiven at last, having made a good use of their great and sore trial.

Perhaps you imagine, that it would have a great effect on you, had you stood by, and seen our Lord cast out an evil spirit. Know then for certain, that bye and bye, you will see Him cast the great Prince of the Evil spirits, not out of one man only, but out of the whole redeemed world. He will be cast out for ever, and all his army of accursed ones with him: and that will happen, of which his entering into the swine was, as it may seem, a faint image and shadow: those who might have been delivered from

him, but chose rather to be foul and filthy with him, will be hurried down by him and with him into the lake, and will perish, not in the waters but in the fire.

Thus you see how the Day of Judgement will unite all miracles in one; and yet hitherto I have not spoken of the great miracle of all, which will be wrought upon every child of Adam, good and bad, in that day. I mean, the opening of all our graves, and the resurrection of our bodies at the sound of the last trumpet. Were you told by one who knew, that after some very short time you should stand by such a grave as that of Lazarus, and see it opened, and the corpse therein coming to life again, do you think you should soon forget it? Why then, do you not oftener think of that, which we are quite sure to behold and to experience; all the dead men in the whole world coming out of their places of rest, and our Lord saying to the angels concerning every one, "let him go to his own place."

And yet there will be other great miracles after this; and we shall behold them too, either to our joy or to our despair. For as the disciples were eye-witnesses of our Lord's Majesty, when He was transfigured, and His face and apparel were glorified: so shall we be eye-witnesses of the glory and majesty of those, whose vile bodies will then be changed and made like unto His glorious Body: and woe unto those who shall see it, not partaking of it themselves. And as the same disciples saw our risen Saviour, how He went up bodily into Heaven, so will the whole assembled world see the Saints, when Christ has absolved them, how they

shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and to abide for ever with the Lord.

Thus will all our Lord's mighty works, from His opening the eyes of the blind to His own glorious Ascension, be in a manner repeated to us ; we shall see and experience them ourselves, at His second Coming. The blind eyes will see Him, the deaf ears will hear Him : and more, O joy of joys and comfort of comforts, the sinful souls and bodies, being purified by true repentance, will yield themselves up to Him, and be received by Him, to love and serve Him for ever.

What should those eyes be, my brethren, what those ears, limbs, souls, which are to be witnesses of such things—nay more, to share in them ! How shall we bear it, if we be not purified in time ? “ O Lord, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts ! ”

SERMON X.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. II.

ALL THE SOULS OF MEN.

REV. XX. 12, 13.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.”

LAST Friday, if you remember, I said something of the wonderful things which we shall see and hear at the last day, how that we shall then, in a manner, be witnesses of all miracles at once. To-night I am desirous of setting before you another very wonderful and awful circumstance of that great day, viz: that it will in a manner introduce us at once to all departed spirits, to the whole world of dead men. We may consider the thing in this way. All of us, who are used to any religious thought at all, know something of what faith is, and how hard it is to practise it in earnest. Faith is looking to the eternal things out of sight, to Heaven and hell, to the great Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, to Jesus Christ, and His saving Cross, to the Saints and Angels in Heaven. A man has faith when he looks towards these, neglecting in a manner the things

which are in sight, although they are ever so pressing on his body and outward senses. S. Stephen had faith, when the cruel stones were being showered on him, and he, disregarding them, looked up to Heaven, and thought earnestly of Jesus Christ. The poor widow had faith, when she gave her two mites for the repair of the temple, not minding her having nothing left, and thought of God in Heaven looking graciously upon her. This is faith. But we know too well how hard it is to practise it, here in this evil world ; how exceeding hard to lift up our hearts above the things which we see, hear, and feel, to the great things which are beyond sense, so as in earnest to care for Eternity more than time, to value our souls more than our bodies. We know how hard it is, and how great need to make use of all the helps that God gives us, to the practising of this faith ; and among others to think very often of the great day, the day of Judgement, and to draw, in our minds and imaginations, as exactly as we can, the picture of what will then happen, as Holy Scripture sets it before us.

The rich man, in our Lord's parable, thought it would be a great thing, if Lazarus could come again from the dead, and shew himself to his five brethren, who were leading bad lives on earth. Surely, said he, "if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." I dare say, many before now have had the same kind of thought. They have said to themselves, "How hard it is, how next to impossible, to have steady thoughts of the other world, as of what we must really come to ! But if I could once see a spirit, then it would be in comparison easy. If God

would once raise up one of my departed acquaintance from the grave, and cause him to stand before me, and bear witness of the awful things in that world out of sight, then I could and should of course believe it all, and never forget it." So men think. And no doubt most of them would feel it more or less, for a certain time. God has so made us, that even the most unbelieving would be touched for a while, at least, by the actual sight and hearing of a ghost, or of an Angel. When people hear, or read, or think, or dream of such things, they all feel in their measure as Eliphaz felt in the book of Job. He says, "^a A thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men. Fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones to shake; then a spirit passed before my face: the hair of my flesh stood up: it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes; there was silence, and I heard a voice." Who does not tremble and feel an inward shuddering, when he is told of such things as these? when he thinks on them quietly and in silence? Who does not in some degree imagine, that, if God were to visit him, surely he should mind it, and think of it night and day? Or if he were told before, and knew for certain, that such a thing would happen to him, it seems natural to think that he would be often and very seriously looking on to it.

Now, my brethren, the thing we have to meditate on to-day is this; that before long we shall all see, not one spirit only, but all the spirits of all the de-

^a Job iv. 12—16.

parted. We believe now, that there are such things; we believe in them, not yet seeing them; but then we shall see them; then faith will be turned into sight. If nature herself teaches us to be so greatly moved by the expectation or imagination of seeing only one dead person, how will it be with us, when we come to set our eyes on all dead persons at once! For so it will be at the day of Judgement, when we come out of our own graves. God give us all grace not to speak or think of that moment without inward fear and trembling! We shall see around us all our acquaintance, all whom we ever knew on earth, coming out of their graves also. For instance, the graves in this churchyard, which we pass by every Sunday at least, will then every one be opened, and their tenants will come forth in our sight. Every one at whose funeral we ever attended, will be there. Perhaps at the time we looked down into the grave, and thought within ourselves, "Now I have seen the last of him." But it was a mistake, we had not seen the last. It was better, and more Christian, if we said this within ourselves: "Farewell! but only for the present: before long we meet again, but who knows how we shall meet? God grant that it may be with joy, not with shame and confusion of face, on our part, or on his!" Such a prayer as that I should call a wise and Christian prayer, to come into a man's mind, when he looks for the last time into his friend's or kinsman's grave, before he turns away to retire from the churchyard. But whether we have such good thoughts or no, certain it is, the thing will come to pass. We are sure to see our departed acquaintance again. We may look forward to the meeting

with hope and consolation, or we may look forward to it only with pain and fear and horror. Any how a meeting there will be. Christ has warned us of it. We must all stand together before His Judgement seat. There we shall see and know again the friends whom we most loved here, and to part from whom seemed almost more than we could bear. What will it be if, when we do meet again, it should be only in order to an eternal parting, through their fault or ours?

We shall see those whom we have here looked up to ; our kind good friends, who put us in the way of salvation ; our parents who brought us to the holy laver of regeneration ; our godfathers and godmothers, by whom Christ laid His "easy yoke and light burden" upon us ; our teachers and instructors, who shewed us, one by one, what God would have us learn, to do us good in this life, and in the next ; our good and holy companions and friends, whom the Lord put in our way to set us a good example. We shall see them all : and the sight will be to us either joy unspeakable, or intolerable grief and reproach ; joy unspeakable both to them and us, if through God's great mercy we shall meet them on the Right Hand and thank them for what they did, God putting it in their hearts, towards saving our souls : but it will be remorse and shame unspeakable, if we see them on the other side, and feel that we have to reproach ourselves for ever, because when God called us by them, by their wise and loving words and examples, we did not answer ; we stubbornly looked another way ; we would not regard, when they most patiently tried one way and another to bring us to a better

mind. And now we see them once again, this once again we see them before the throne of judgement, but we shall see them no more for ever : only the remembrance of them will be a torture to lost souls through all eternity, considering what a blessing they might have been to us, and how we would none of them.

Consider also, that we shall meet, in that day with a very great many, whose faces we knew not in the flesh, yet by God's fatherly providence (as we shall then clearly see) they were made to be a great deal to us, one way or another. We shall meet all the holy persons, all the Saints, whom we have read or heard of, whether in Scripture or in Church history. Perhaps before now your heart has burned within you, when you read of some glorious martyrdom, or some great self-denial or sacrifice joyfully undertaken for Christ's love. You may have said to yourself, "What a thing it would be, could one know by sight such a person as S. Paul, or S. John ; how much one would give to hear S. Peter repeat his creed, or David one of his Psalms !" Behold then, in the day of Judgement, all these privileges in one will be granted to all faithful souls. You will see all the Saints in their glory, from righteous Abel to our Lord Himself, and from our Lord onwards even unto the end of the world. Our Saviour has told us, that this will be part of our reward, to "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven ;" even as the unbelieving will find it part of their punishment, to see Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

We shall see also, O fearful sight ! we shall see the wicked persons, the great enormous sinners whom we have read of ; the persecutors of the Saints, the

enemies of all goodness, the inventors of evil things, the false prophets and heretical teachers. If they died impenitent, fearful will it be to meet them in that day; and most fearful, if we have permitted ourselves, knowing better, to be led astray by them, to have pleasure in what we know God hates.

Now it may be, a man shall take up what he knows to be a bad book, and read more or less in it, and lay it down, and not think much of the great sin he is guilty of. But what, if that bad book cause evil thoughts, and words, and doings? And what if it corrupt and stain the man's conscience for ever? And what if he should meet in that day the unknown writer of the book, and author of the mischief, and they both have to bewail their doings, both the tempter and the tempted, when it is too late to repent?

Yes, and in all cases, when one has set or followed a bad example, most fearful is it to imagine, how the person who sets it, will endure at the last day to be told, perhaps by hundreds whom he never could know of on earth: "You sinned and I followed you, and others afterwards followed me: and now alas! we have to bear one another's burdens as well as our own."

And not only those who distinctly followed a man's example, but those also, whom in any way he encouraged in sin by his own sinful carelessness, will appear against him, be sure, in that final account. As we go about the world, if we have not the fear of God before our eyes, and the love of Christ in our hearts, there is no saying, how much mischief we may do: what souls we may help to ruin without knowing it, by things which seem at the time very little, and

insignificant: by smiling, and being or seeming amused at what we know to be unclean and wrong; by looking curiously, when we ought not; by letting things pass, which men properly expect us to reprove; by taking any irreverent liberty with anything that belongs to God. Take care, my brethren, that you be not in a way to find in that fearful Judgement, that a very heavy account stands against you in God's book, for encouragement which you have given unknowingly to other mens' sins. You gave it unknowingly; but nevertheless it may stand against you, because you ought to have known, you ought to have considered.

And contrariwise—it is a thought very full of comfort,—our gracious Redeemer permits men to hope that many will have their crowns brightened in that day by good done to others, of which they were not themselves the least aware. They went on simply doing their duty in their calling: bye and bye they will perceive that their quiet example was made by God's grace a help towards “turning many to righteousness.”

How many, may we not suppose, will hereafter thank that poor widow for putting in her two mites into the treasury, and so obtaining those encouraging words of Christ, which have ever since been like a spring at the heart of such as give alms for His sake? How many will thank the holy and pure-hearted Joseph, for shewing them how to overcome strong temptation, whereby, being dead, he yet spake to their souls, and greatly helped them, by God's grace, to keep their crown by chastity, or recover it by penitence!

Remember this, I beseech you, my Christian brethren, in all your dealings with one another especially : that, as surely as we are with our brethren now, and make a difference to them by our ways and examples, so surely shall we be with them again, before the everlasting Judgement-seat. Thither all souls of men shall be gathered, and shall look one another in the face, and what they have been to one another shall openly appear. The little ones of Christ will be there, and He that died for them. Woe unto him that shall have caused them offence ; but he that shall have given them but a cup of cold water, the least refreshment and help in their duty, “ shall in no wise lose his reward.”

SERMON XI.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. III.

THE GOOD ANGELS.

S. MATT. xvi. 27.

“The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels.”

AMONG other wonderful and mysterious things, which will become visible to our very eyes by the light of the Judgement Day, we know by Scripture, that we shall see all the holy Angels. They are now around us on every side, waiting on us, doing great things for us; but we never yet saw, heard, or felt one of them. But in that day we shall see them openly; we shall hear the rustling of their wings: the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God, will sound distinct and clear in our ears. And it would seem as if God intended that we should take especial notice of this circumstance. Our Saviour says, “when the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations.” And to hinder us from cowardly shame, He says, “^aWhosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed

^a S. Luke ix. 26.

ed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." S. Paul says, "bThe Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God." And S. John saw Him in his vision, coming out of Heaven; "and the armies which were in Heaven," i. e. the Saints and Angels, "c followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean."

There are a great many other places: but these are sufficient to show that our Lord intends us Christians, when we are thinking of the Day of Judgement, to make a good deal of the circumstance, that the holy Angels will be present with Him. He will not have us think of His own presence only, but also of the thousands and ten thousands which will stand before Him, and minister to Him. For in this way He condescends to help His frail imperfect creatures, to apprehend more entirely His unspeakable Majesty. Just as an earthly king or queen, coming alone into any place, brings with him all his dignity; it cannot be separated from his person, and all who know him to be the king, are as much bound to reverence and obey him, as if he came in all his pomp: yet still, it pleases royal persons generally, and has always been thought wise and right for them, to come in state on solemn occasions with many guards, and attendants around them. So the great King of Heaven and earth, when He comes to take finally to Him His great power and reign for ever, will have His heavenly guards and attendants, the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Angels and Archangels,

b 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

c Rev. xix. 14.

and all the powers of Heaven, openly waiting on Him in our sight.

And not only will they wait on Him, but they will also wait on us His members. A mighty angel will cry aloud "the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him." Another, we may suppose, will sound the great trumpet, the voice of which will be heard, at once, over all the earth; the dead will hear it, and come out of their graves. And as angels were present at our Lord's Resurrection, and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, so, we may well suppose, will they be employed to open the graves of good Christians in that day, over which graves they have so long been keeping their watch. As angels, again, carried Lazarus into his rest in the bosom of Abraham, so it is permitted us to hope that, bye and bye, by the same holy and glorious beings, every faithful and obedient Christian will be caught up, in that day, to meet the Lord in the air; and, when He returns into Heaven through the everlasting doors, as the Angels will wait on Him, so they will wait on the righteous, who go up with Him.

And there is also another very fearful office which our Saviour Himself ascribes to them. As in time of harvest, the master of the field may say to the reapers; "gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them;" so in the end of this world, "The Son-of Man shall send forth His Angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." And we see in

the Book of Revelations that when any of God's enemies are to be remarkably punished, the Angels are sent to do the work. The seven Angels go forth, and pour out on God's creation the seven vials of His wrath. An angel takes up a great stone and casts it into the sea, and says, "^athus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." And greatest of all, an ^eangel comes from Heaven having in his hand the key of the bottomless pit, and lays hold of the old serpent, the great enemy, and casts him into the bottomless pit, and binds him, and sets a seal upon him. All these things are types and shadows of the final office of the good Angels at the last Day, when they shall not only wait upon Christ's true servants, and help them, in ways ordained of God, to be happy and glorious for ever; but also help to confound and punish the impenitent, as a sort of executioners of God's most just judgement.

Now, it is not hard to perceive and feel, what thoughts we should have of that great and fearful hour, if we laid to heart these sayings of our Lord, His Prophets, and Apostles, concerning the share which His good angels will have in it. Recollect that it is no new thing for the good angels to be about us. They have been so ever since our Baptism. Ever since the moment you were made a member of Christ, one, at least, of that glorious company who always see the face of His Father in Heaven, has been your angel; has cared continually for you, has been at hand to guide you in all your ways; to hold you in his hands, that you hurt not your foot against a stone

^a Rev. xviii. 21.^e Ib. xx. 1—3.

i. e. that you stumbled not, fell not into sin, because of temptation set in your daily path. Your Guardian Angel has been like a kind nurse stationed near your bed at night, to keep off bad spirits, and to help you, as one created being may help another, to good prayers, and good thoughts. He has mourned whenever you were perverse, and has rejoiced over you when you overcame temptation, or by penitence recovered from sin. He has been constantly about you, only you could neither see nor feel him: you could but believe what you learned out of the word of God concerning him. And I daresay you think, that if you could have seen him, if he could have become visible to you, in the trying moments of your life, you would have done better than you did. Had the Lord opened your eyes as He once did Balaam's eyes, and you had seen the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand, I daresay you think it would have stopped you in the way of sin. Well, remember henceforth, that this *will* be your case one day. The Lord *will* open your eyes, and you will see the angel of the Lord, your own Guardian Angel, standing by to see you judged. He will be there to bear witness, either against you, or for you.

Do you not know how joyful it is, when any child, or young person has done well at school, or at service, and the teacher or master reports well of him to his parents, and says, I can give my account of him with gladness, I have nothing but good to say of him: or if there have been anything wrong, it has been all thoroughly repented of, and amended. And, on the other hand, some of us may know some-

thing of the bitterness of being evil-reported of to our parents. But what is all that a kind master or teacher can say here, compared to the thought of being presented before the throne of Christ Himself, and hearing our guardian angel say, "Receive him O Lord and bless him; for he has listened to my warnings? He has not made my loving care void, nor cast away his own soul; he has turned from his sins in true contrition and amendment, and has sought pardon in due time." And what are all the reproving words of friends, or instructors, justly offended and complaining of young people to their parents here? What are they all, or the bitter tears which they draw forth, compared with the misery of that hour, when the good angel shall say, "I was intrusted with this man, and I did Thy bidding, O Lord, for his good, but he would none of me; he refused to obey my voice, and at last by his stubbornness he compelled me to depart from him." Who shall bear it, when the good and kind spirit, who was more than a nursing father to him on earth, shall so turn and testify, against him?

Another thought which seems to be put into our minds by what Scripture tells us of the angels accompanying our Judge, is, that we shall, then and there, see all those gracious and mighty angels whom we have especially read or heard of, in God's word, some of them by their proper names. We shall see Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, who was sent to Zacharias to shew the glad tidings of the approaching birth of S. John Baptist, and was afterwards sent to the blessed Virgin Mary with the unspeakably more joyful and wonderful tidings of

the Incarnation of the Son of God. Gabriel will be by, at the Last Judgement, and will, by his presence, bear witness against us, if we have refused to believe his glad tidings, or, believing, have turned away to the things of this world. The great Archangel Michael will be there, who warred for us in Heaven against the devil and his angels; and woe be to us, if he should then pass us over and say, "This man was not on my side in the day of battle; he cannot be on Thy side, O Lord, in the day of triumph." The angels of healing, such as Raphael in the book of Tobit, they will be there, to reprove such as would not be the better for the mercies God wrought by their means; and to present before Him the prayers and tears of those who repented in sickness, or were humbly thankful in recovery. In a word, all the blessed spirits who serve God day and night, casting their crowns before the throne, will be there, to put us all to shame, that we have not served God better; that we have been so nice, and delicate and particular, so unwilling to give ourselves up in earnest, or to make sacrifices of our will and liking for His sake.

One thing more I have to say, and I desire to say it with especial fear and reverence; it relates to those angels in particular, who are with us when we worship in this Church; who are with us here, watching us at this very moment. I would we might always think and speak of them, not without deep fear and reverence; for they are our witnesses, chosen of God for us, to see how we behave in His presence. S. Paul speaks of such, as being in all Christian congregations, and says, that Christian women should

make a difference in their dress because of them. Make sure of it then, though we see them not, yet are they here present; it greatly affronts them, when any one here behaves irreverently. If God did not hold their hand, very likely they would strike down the careless, rude, scornful worshipper, as they have done before now in His temple. And what if they do not visit us now? It will be no comfort to us, when in the great King's presence they shall stand forth and say, "Lord, here are persons who knew very well that Thy house was the house of prayer, yet, all their life long, they went on treating it as a den of thieves; either staying away from it, or profaning it when they came, by their rude unbelieving ways." Will not our Lord hear His good angels, when they so complain to Him? Will He receive those to His palace in Heaven, who proved so unworthy of His outer chambers on earth?

But let us not omit to imagine, also, the humble delight of the good and reverential worshipper, who comes here, as constantly as he can, and behaves as dutifully as he can, when he comes. We are not forbidden to imagine how it will be, when some good angel, now here present (God be merciful to us, if we think or speak unworthily) shall offer to the Lord, Who hath promised to be here also, the soul and body of some devout worshipper, such as I trust will never be quite wanting here; faithful and patient old men or women; honest and dutiful tradesmen; servants or labourers; charitable rich men, or contented poor men; little children, learning already how to give themselves up to God; young men, or maidens training themselves against temptation by steady

use of the means of grace. Such as these, I trust in our good Saviour, will never be wanting in this place; though there is too much reason to fear, they are now but a very few, out of many, and no man can say for certain which they are. Yet never, I trust, will this Church be wholly without them; and be they many, or be they few, not one of them, be sure, will be wanting in the Day of Judgement. The good angels, who are waiting on them now, will then receive the crown of their labours: and O may there be many an one also, among those over whom they now mourn, who shall give them cause at last of everlasting joy! For as they are indignant, and ready to smite down those who come in coldness and insolence, so is there great rejoicing among them, when they see one humbly kneeling, or saying his prayers in earnest for the first time.

SERMON XII.

THE REVELATIONS OF THAT DAY. IV.

THE FACE OF GOD.

JOB xix. 26, 27.

“In my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another: though my reins be consumed within me.”

I HAVE said something, on former Advent evenings, of the awful and astonishing revelations, which the last Day will suddenly bring upon us: how that we shall then see all miracles being wrought at once, be, all at once, introduced to all dead men, and to all the angels of God. And I did mean to have said something of another very fearful disclosure, which will be made in that day, to some at least of the children of men; they will see the evil spirits, in all their foulness, and horror. Satan will accuse them; and they, not being able to answer, will be delivered over to him, as to the chief of the tormentors; and with him, and such as are like him, they will have to dwell for ever. This is a sad, and terrible thought; all of us, who have any faith, shrink from any kind of dream of the Evil one; we feel that we could not bear to see him, waking or sleeping. It is one of the things which makes darkness frightful; and well

may it do so, to those who do not truly fear God, and trust in Him. What then, if it should be our dismal lot, not only to see the devil and his angels when we rise out of our graves, but never after to lose them out of our sight; to have no other companions for a miserable eternity?

However, I am not now going to dwell on this. I had rather, if so it please God, that we prepared our souls for the good and great day which is coming, by far happier thoughts. Instead of that fearful and loathsome sight of the Evil spirit, such as he is, I would we might now, not unworthily remember, that which will be the crown and glory above all the other crowns and glories of the blessed; namely, that in that day, they will see God as He is. Now, neither good nor bad can see Him; and we have reason to think, that if they could, without a miracle it would be their utter destruction; but in that day all will see Him, and to them that lovingly wait for Him, the sight will be overflowing joy and transport which will never have an end.

Let us consider, as humbly as we can, what He has taught us of this great matter.

When God first made man on earth, before he had sinned, the sight of God was his great happiness; as we read of the garden of Eden, that the Lord God walked there, and Adam heard His voice, and there was the Presence of the Lord God. But as soon as ever man sinned, he forfeited, first, the joy of God's presence, and then, the visible presence itself. First, he hid himself for fear, instead of hastening out, as a happy child, to meet his loving and gracious Father; he hid himself from the presence of the Lord

God, among the trees of the garden ; and afterwards, he was driven out from the very place where God was used to show Himself to him. He was driven out ; and a flaming sword, the sword of the wrath of Almighty God, was placed between him and the tree of life ; that tree which alone could give him strength to endure such near and open communion with the Most High. From that time man, being sinful, has been separated from his Maker. It is noticed in the Old Testament from beginning to end. Jacob having wrestled with the angel, wondered that he had seen God, and his life was preserved. The children of Israel at the foot of mount Sinai, spake of this as the greatest of wonders ; "We have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth." And to His most favoured servant Moses, even when He shewed most of Himself, He said, "^aI will pass by thee, and proclaim the Name of the Lord, and I will take away My hand, and thou shalt see My back parts, but My face cannot be seen. Thou canst not see My face, for no man can see My face and live."

What then was man to do ? He could not be happy without seeing God, yet the sight of God would be his death. Must he not either perish, or be miserable for ever ?

Here then is God's wonderful way of reconciling this great contradiction. We could not see Him as He is, it would be our death ; but in order that we might see Him, He became what before He was not : He became Man ; He took to Himself our whole nature, both soul and body ; He went about openly in the sight of men for thirty three years ; and it

^a Exod. xxxiii. 19, 20.

was life not only to see, but to touch Him; virtue went out of Him to heal all that were sick. And to increase the wonder, He not only offered Himself on the Cross for our sins, but ever since gives Himself continually to us in the Holy Communion, whereby we obtain that better strength and life which will enable us to bear the sight of Him again. Those who are worthy communicants, and die in that grace, will be helped to see God, not only as Adam and Eve saw Him in Paradise, but more as He is seen by the blessed spirits in Heaven. They shall see not His back parts, but His Face. They shall see His Face; they shall see Him as He is: they shall be like the angels who always behold the Face of the great Father in Heaven.

That will be the blessing of good Christians after judgement. But all, whether good or bad, will see the Face of our Lord when He comes to be our Judge. Even as so many of those that were living in Judæa eighteen hundred years ago saw Him face to face; saw Him going in and out among them; saw Him and lived; so shall we all see Him in judgement. Keep your thoughts on this, I beseech you, for one moment. If there were any person now among our acquaintance, of whom we knew for certain, that before very long Christ our Lord would appear to him bodily, whether in church, or at home, or as he walked by the way; should we not look with enquiring wonder on that person? Should we not say to ourselves, what a thing it will be for him, either for good or for evil? Well, I say to you, one and all, whoever you are, "You are that person." You are one who in a short time will see God face to face.

You will see Him coming in the clouds of heaven. “^b Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him:” not only the Jews and Romans, whose nails and spears ran into His blessed Body, but wicked and unbelieving Christians also, who have been continually piercing and crucifying Him afresh by their sins. This will be the crown of the revelations of that Day. The veil will be finally taken away, and all, both good and bad, shall truly see God. God the Son made manifest in the flesh! All shall see Him; but how differently! To some that sight will be heaven, to others it will be hell. On the left hand it will be eternal death, on the right hand everlasting life. We shall see God, and our life shall be preserved, so far as that we shall not fall back into nothing, and become as if we had never been; but will it be the life of angels, or of lost spirits?

In our flesh we shall see God. Our very bodily eyes shall see Him; it is a sight which we must face. Do you ask me, “How are we to prepare ourselves for it?” I will answer by asking again, “How do men prepare their eyes to see a very dazzling light? Do they keep looking at the dark, or do they use themselves by degrees to the brightness which they know is coming upon them?” I suppose we all naturally do something of that sort; if we want to look at the sun, we do not shut our eyes, or darken the room, and then look suddenly up to the bright orb shining at noon-day; but we look first through a curtain, or through our shaded hand, and we let in more light by little and little, till at last we are

^b Rev. i. 7.

able to bear as much as is good for us. Something like this our Lord would have us do in regard of His own glorious light, which we know we must all see at the last Day. If we altogether hide our eyes from it now; if we keep looking down into the darkness of this world; if we darken the room, that is our heart, by shutting out good thoughts and prayers; of course we shall be utterly unable to bear the glory of His final appearing; and yet we shall be forced to look on it. But if we use the helps which He has provided for us in His Church, then our eyes will gradually strengthen, and be able to look upon God. Our good works done in humble faith, our prayers, our holy readings, our Sundays, and Saints' days, and most of all our Holy Communions, will be so many quiet openings of the shutters, so many partial liftings of the veil, whereby He will teach and school us to look up, and lift up our heads. Not for any good in them, but because, in all and each of these, *He* is showing us Himself, Who became one of us partly for this very purpose. O let us use them in faith, and constantly. Let us not, like too many, get ourselves bewildered and half blinded by mere irregular fits of goodness, taking their turn with a great deal of wilful evil. Let our eyes look straight before us, on to that glorious light which even now we may discern dimly at the end of our journey, as a light shining in a dark place. Let us obediently do our duty, from day to day, and from hour to hour; and though there will be, now and then, earthly clouds, yet on the whole our path will be, as Scripture promises, "a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

SERMON XIII.

CONSCIENCE, AN EARNEST OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT.

1 S. JOHN iii. 20.

“If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

THESE words refer to the great duty, the universal, indispensable duty, of self-examination; and therefore they are well suited for our consideration, at this time of Advent in particular.

For as the evening is the natural time for examining one's self concerning the past day, and forming good resolutions for the next, so is Advent, concerning the past and the next year. The great day of Judgement, the second coming of our Lord, begins now to be set before us, with all its terrible circumstances, foretold by Himself; in order that we, truly judging and trying ourselves, may the more worthily keep our Christmas, the memory of His first coming; and not throw away that His unspeakable favour.

And this so much the more, as the world grows older, and we draw nearer our own latter end. According to the warning which you heard in the Epistle to-day: “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us

therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day."

In this place the Church urges us to consider Advent as our morning-twilight, as our preparation for the coming year. But as no one can rise up and go about his day's work properly, without having well considered his own former failures and weak points, so we shall do rightly to regard Advent as our evening-twilight also; using it as a time to pause and look back upon the past year, and asking ourselves such questions as these: "What have I done? how have I employed myself? what growth have I made in good habits? where, in short, am I now, compared with where I was this time last year? Am I nearer God, or further from Him? Were I to be taken at this moment, would my condition be better or worse?"

These are the sort of questions we should ask; not with any expectation of being able certainly to find out the right answer, but with the certainty of finding enough to alarm us, at least, and put us on our guard; and with the wholesome resolution to keep such our awful thoughts continually before us, and live more wakefully, if so it may be, in the year now beginning, than we have in the past year.

Every body, even the most worldly person, sees at once the advantage of thus looking into things, and examining one's self from time to time. Every one knows the absolute necessity of casting up accounts in trade or business, of reviewing at set periods the condition of one's farm, or shop, or household; of stopping mischiefs in the beginning, before they get too bad to be mended. Every one feels how good it

must be for him to "stand in awe," to put his heart and conscience from time to time more immediately before his God, Who, he knows, is always watching it; "to commune with his own heart and in his chamber and be still." Such exercises keep a man's conscience tender; they give him a better chance of remembering and repenting of sins past; of preparing and bracing himself against future temptation. If you want, for example, to break yourself of anger and passion, common sense teaches you that one most likely way is, to consider every night how far you have transgressed in that way, and every morning what is likely to provoke you; that so you may prepare your heart for the danger to come, and humble your soul for the transgressions that are gone by: and both, in the fear of God.

All these are what may be called the *natural* advantages of regular self-examination; and it has been recommended and (no doubt) practised, for the sake of such advantages as these, by wise and good men, who as yet knew nothing of Christ. But now we who believe the Creed, and know that Christ will come to judge us, we have learned to consider this exercise in a far more awful and mysterious way. To a Christian man, duly considering what Christ's Gospel teaches of the things out of sight, and of the way in which it has pleased the Almighty to connect them with the things in sight, to such an one, solemn self-examination, at certain times, is far more than a prudent precaution, invented or adopted by himself, to keep his passions in order. To him it is a holy exercise, ordained by Almighty God, to be, as it were, a rehearsal of the day of Judgement.

As our nightly sleep is an image of death, so the nightly self-examination of a thoughtful person is in some sort an image of the last great Day.

As the Holy Communion is the earnest and pledge of Heaven, so the trial and judgement of our own selves, which we are ordered to practise before the Holy Communion, is a shadow of that awful hour, when we shall all stand before the judgement-seat of Christ.

As S. John the Baptist came, with his severe calls to repentance, before our Lord; so before Christmas comes Advent, the remembrance of judgement, the warning call, "behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him."

In a word, whenever God visits in graciousness, it will be well with those who have prepared themselves to receive Him, by deeply fixing their hearts on the thought of Him, as now and always present within us, to be our Judge; and examining themselves accordingly, as in that fearful Presence.

I say, "now and always present within us:" for is it not so, that what we call conscience, that inward sense of right and wrong, which every man feels more or less within him, now accusing, now excusing, now whispering peace, and now remorse and self-reproach, is it not true that this is the voice of God? Is it not as the faint low murmurs, which are sometimes heard in the air before a thunder-storm? and are we not sure, that what they tell us, of the sentence to be passed on our misdoings, will be repeated in such tones as shall shake Heaven and earth, when the great day shall come?

A parent, for example, neglects or ill-uses his

child: if he ever feel shame and confusion at thinking of it now, (and surely all, who sin against their own children, must be more or less uneasy, however present temptation may drown their remorse,) he may depend on it, that the shame and confusion which he feels, is hardly to be accounted a faint shadow of what must come upon him, except he repent, when that child and he shall stand together before the all-seeing Eye, and behold It fixed on them.

Or, to take a more common case: a child has been undutiful to a parent, and trembles at the thought of what his parent may next say to him. How will it be with that son or daughter, when he rises from the dead, and feels that he is presently to meet that parent again, except he quickly and earnestly repent?

And so in all other cases: the remorse, the misgivings, the scruples, the gnawing anguish, which men feel, while they are planning any sin, or after they have committed it, are so many hints and tokens from Him, what it must all come to at last, without a great and serious change. “^a The spirit of man,” says Solomon, “is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inmost parts.” That is, if we will listen to the silent warnings of our conscience, which seem to be our own, but in fact come from Him, we shall by degrees improve in the knowledge of ourselves: our secret sins, our deep and hidden dangers, the mystery of our own iniquity will become known to us: happy, if we profit by the knowledge, and resort in good time to that better Spirit, Who only can undo the mischief, wherein we have entangled ourselves.

And this is the meaning of that other wise man,

^a Prov. xx. 27.

who says, “^b Let the counsel of thine own heart stand, for there is no man more faithful unto thee than it.” As if he had said, when your conscience fairly tells you you are wrong, I beseech you, let the impression remain; do not attempt to soothe or trifle it away: they are but false friends, that would help you to do so. To listen to them instead of your conscience, is listening to man instead of God. If your heart and conscience condemn you, God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things: they know next to nothing; they have no power to acquit or condemn. In such a case, therefore, be greatly afraid to take comfort from any one, against the plain reproof of your conscience.

This rule holds, even in respect of that judgement which every man, Christian or heathen, passes by instinct on himself. How much more in the case of Christians, when we recollect what further inward light they have abiding within *them*, what a Judge is come down from Heaven, to preside in the court of *their* conscience! That awful Judge, that heart-searching light, is the most Holy Spirit of God, given to every one of us in Baptism. So we are plainly taught by S. John, in the chapter next before the text, “^c ye have an unction, an anointing, from the Holy One: and ye know all things. The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man should teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.” The anointing was the gift of the Holy Ghost, coming on all Christians in Bap-

^b Ecclus. xxxvii. 13.

^c 1 S. John ii. 20, 27.

tism, as it came on our Lord when He was baptized by S. John. If it teaches us of Christian doctrine, confirming us in the holy Creed, which we have been taught; surely it teaches of Christian practice too, confirming us in the holy commandments, which we have sworn to obey.

Here then is another reason, an unspeakable reason, why Christian persons should attend very much to the warnings of their own conscience. They may be, they very often most surely are, the warnings of the most Holy Comforter : of Him Whom Christ has sent to dwell in our hearts, to guide us into all truth.

You think it strange, that the children of Israel, plainly directed as they were by the cloud in sight over the tabernacle door, which way to move, what to do, Whom to serve, that they should ever have broken God's ordinances, and moved backward instead of forward. Why, it is the very thing you do yourself, as often as the voice within bids you forbear, and you go wilfully on; as often as it bids you abstain, and you indulge. The perverse Jews had not more reason to know that God was guiding them in the cloud, than we Christians have to acknowledge Him present, and speaking in our hearts by His Spirit.

Depend on it, it is no slight or mean gift, that Unction from the Holy One. Having it, the Apostle says, "we know all things." The expression is remarkable, and answers wonderfully to those words of S. Paul, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." To know all things, and to do all things, are great privileges indeed, and such as we never durst have affirmed of any but the Most High God Himself: but He, you perceive, affirms

them of all Christians: so making good His own declaration, so wonderful to think of, by another Apostle, that we are partakers of the Divine nature.

Let us not then be afraid to trust our own heart, whenever it tells us plainly that we are not in a good way: rather let us be very much afraid not to trust it, not to obey it; for it is a voice from a place where God has promised to be. To use again the words of the text: "If our heart" (our natural conscience) "condemn us, God," the Holy Ghost dwelling in our heart, "is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things:" knoweth much that our own heart hath either forgotten or never knew, the many sad circumstances and shades of deeper guilt in our sin. The Holy Spirit knows all this, and if our sin seem bad to ourselves, depend upon it, it is in His sight infinitely worse.

Thus, whether we regard ourselves as judged by our own conscience, or by the sacred in-dwelling Spirit, either way we come to this very serious conclusion; that whatever our own heart reproves us for, God is reproofing, and will reprove us, very much more. When we reject such warnings, we reject the Holy Ghost; when we stifle and drown them, we quench the Holy Ghost; when we endeavour to turn away from them, or only to dismiss them with slight notice, then we grieve the Holy Ghost, and provoke Him to diminish His grace.

Here, I say, is matter for serious thought indeed, could we bring the doctrine home to our hearts, as thoroughly as we believe it with our minds, and acknowledge it with our lips. I will try to set down its effect in a few cases: but, first, I will guard against a wrong use which may be made of it.

We know that there is such a thing as a mistaken conscience, imagining things wrong and inexcusable, which are not so at all ; and it is possible that such an one hearing, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things," may be led to pain and grieve himself all the more. Whereas these words, if he would consider them, may suggest a way of thought which may calm him and set him right. If your heart condemn you, that is, if you be inclined to vex yourself about something which you did at the time for the best, but which has turned out ill, remember that God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things ; and perhaps this matter may be of less consequence in His eyes than it appears now to you ; your great concern about it may be in part a snare of the devil, to turn you away from present and pressing duties. You had better commit it to God with penitence and prayer : leave it in His hand, and set about your day's work cheerfully.

This, if the case were really doubtful, and you did for the best : but it is another matter, when the case was plain, and your conscience spoke out, and you disregarded it ; then, I fear, you come under the more alarming sense of the text ; then God's greater knowledge of your ways and thoughts will only serve to confirm your own heart's condemnation. Your only way of safety and wisdom will be, most humbly to submit to this ; to embrace and hold fast the thought, as part of that Cross, which, however it burthen and gall you, is your only salvation.

Settle it in your hearts to believe, and carry the thought about with you every where, in your work and in your rest, that the serious misgiving of your

own heart is the call of the Holy Ghost within you, and therefore, whatever seems decidedly bad to you, must, of course, appear much more so to Him. Endeavour to have this assurance quite familiar and ready in your mind, and use it to help you in putting away the many whispers of the Evil spirit, whereby, if he could, he would encourage you to stifle all that your own heart, all that God's good Spirit, may say of the charge that lies against you.

For example, he is ready, not seldom, with this suggestion; that, to be sure, your own conduct, in such and such things, does appear contrary to rule, when it is thought over; but then, could we know all (so the Evil one argues), we should, probably, find many more just as bad, of whom we, and all men, have now a very good opinion. Well, and suppose it were so, the question is, not whether others are as bad or worse, but whether, if I do such things, I can possibly be good enough to please God. And this is no question, but a certain impossibility, in the eyes of those who really believe and recollect, that the voice of their conscience, pleading with them, is the voice of the Holy Ghost. Others may be impure in secret, and the same voice may plead with them also; or it may not plead so distinctly as with you; of that you know nothing: but this one thing you do know, that the Sacred Voice has pleaded, and is pleading, in your heart against impurity; and now, if you sin, you sin deliberately, under the very eye of the Judge. You must take the consequences, and will have no reason to complain, should you find them infinitely worse than you now understand; as much worse as might be expected from the difference between God's know-

ledge and yours, concerning the real amount and guilt of your sins.

But, it may be, the tempter takes another tone with you, and tries to persuade you, that, after all, there is not so much in what we call conscience; it is matter, he may say, of opinion, of feeling, of fancy: there is as much difference in consciences as in tastes; and He Who made all, will make allowance for all. Any how, he will say, there must be great liberties allowed, where people's judgements differ so very widely.

Now here, again, the thought of God present within, and of conscience, His attendant, repeating His decisions in our hearts, seems well calculated to put such impiety to silence. Men's consciences do *not* differ so widely, as the devil and his messengers would persuade us. Who is there, all over the earth, that does not own the duty of children to honour their parents? who that does not feel, that for good, good should be returned? Trust the voice of God within, and believe, in spite of those bad suggestions, that others hear it, or have heard it, as well as you. The proud Assyrian said, "There is no religion, no God, that can stand against me. Is not one place as another? is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arphad? is not Samaria as Damascus?" But good Hezekiah believed his own heart, which told him, there was a Lord God in Israel Who dwelt between the Cherubim, and to Whom he might come in all his perplexities; and the end shewed which was right; the Assyrian was cut off, and Hezekiah was saved.

Again (and this, perhaps, is the most numerous

class of all), there are those who are inclined to dismiss all serious thoughts and scruples, for a time at least, altogether from their minds; as if they would come again in good time, whenever it shall please God; and, in the mean while, they may take things easy.

Now, (not to speak here of the desperate madness of taking for granted, that it will please God to give them as much time as they demand, and be found of them whenever they please to seek, although He has distinctly said, "Some shall seek Him early, and shall not find Him:") consider, I beseech you, what you would think of one, who should hear God's voice actually calling to him from Heaven, and should answer, as S. Paul was answered by Felix; "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee?" Would it not be unutterable profaneness? And yet, if the voice of conscience be indeed the voice of God's Holy Spirit speaking within us, this is what we really do say, when we put away self-condemning thoughts.

And when the world and worldly friends say, Do not be so over-serious; do not turn melancholy and gloomy before the time; there will be plenty of leisure by and by for meditating on such matters; is not this, in effect, advising one's friend to give that very answer to the Almighty Himself, which sounds so profane, when we read of it as given to an Apostle?

I beg of you to turn this over in your minds; for surely neglect of inward scruples and warnings is one of the commonest of all sins, and very few there are—are there any?—who know how heinous a sin it is. Few, very few, if any, are accustomed to believe,

and recollect, and realize, the presence of God's Spirit in a Christian's heart, so as really to distinguish His warning or condemning voice, in the low deep murmurings of their own conscience, when they are set on thinking of their own ways, past or to come.

For example, a young person is tempted to tell a lie, to obtain some present satisfaction, or get himself out of some present trouble. He does it with uneasiness for the first time; and the thought will come in and disturb him afterwards, "that all liars," they are the words of the most High God, "shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." It would be well for a person in such a state of mind, if some one were nigh to remind him, that these scruples, these troublesome thoughts, are not his own; there is a great and good Spirit present in him; He puts them into his mind. Such a recollection might, perhaps, prevail on some to cherish these holy scruples, and really to obey them, confessing and bewailing their falsehood, in the hope that the pain and shame of doing so might be accepted by their Judge as a sort of holy revenge, which they take upon themselves for their great sin; and not only confessing and bewailing it, but really turning from it for ever. When your conscience tells you that you have told a lie, be that lie more or less shocking in its circumstances, still the very thought is the whisper of the Teacher within you; His warning never to do so again, but to speak the truth boldly, as you ought to speak, though it be to your own worldly hindrance: you, who are a member of Christ and, through Him, of all Christians.

There will be whispers of a contrary kind, en-

couraging you to think lightly of the sin, nay, perhaps even to pride yourself on the skill, with which you have made the falsehood serve your own purpose for a time. But you will know from what sort of spirit those whisperings come, and will put them out of your mind accordingly.

Else, if you unhappily listen to them, and either please yourself with your deceit, and what you have gained by it, or, at least, forget to repent of it, then, the next time a tempting opportunity of the like kind arises (and it will not be long before the devil contrives one), the Holy Spirit, vexed by your former profaneness, will whisper to your heart less loudly; the prayers of your friends will avail less in your favour; your own prayers will savour more of hypocrisy and a double mind. If you fall again, the third time, your chance will be still less; and so on, till a regular habit of falsehood is formed, and the Holy Spirit, grieved more and more, quite ceases to warn and make you uneasy in your sin.

Wherefore, whether it be telling lies, or any other sin to which you are tempted, beware of overcoming or slighting the *first* scruple; beware how you turn away your ear from the voice, however still and small, which comes over your heart in secret, saying, "That is not the way, walk not in it." For, as surely as God has made you, that voice, if it come of your natural conscience, is a true reporter of His judgement; and as surely as God's Holy Spirit has entered into you, to regenerate you, and make you a member of Christ, so surely is the same voice breathed from that Holy Spirit, to keep you from vexing Him, and forcing Him to forsake you

And be not afraid, thus to call in God's Holy Spirit (I do not say in words, but in the secret thoughts of your heart) on every occasion ; slight though it seem to you, it is not slight, if it prove the beginning of a sin. Since He vouchsafes to be present with you in all things, in what seems little, as well as in what all men would call startling and awakening occasions, do you have so much reverence, as to try to remember Him in all things. Be, what many will call, particular and scrupulous. Encourage all thoughts of caution and holy fear, though even to yourself they may seem, at first sight, to come unseasonably, and to be more than is required. For aught you know, they may be the whisperings of God's most Holy Spirit, coming just when you need them. Your peace, if not your salvation, may depend on your listening to them. You may find hereafter, that, in receiving them, you have been entertaining angels unawares ; and not only angels, but the Son of God Himself. For such godly motions are His tokens ; and if we love Him so well, as to attend to them and keep His words, He hath said, "My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with Him."

SERMON XIV.

USE TO BE MADE OF MISGIVINGS OF CONSCIENCE.

1 S. John iii. 20.

“If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

God is present in the heart of man;—the Holy Spirit more especially in the heart of Christian regenerate man; and therefore self-examination is not simply a useful exercise, but a mysterious rehearsing in secret of the awful judgement, which all will know of at the last Day. Think of this, you that are inclined to quiet yourselves under the reproaches of your own conscience, with the thought that if you could know all, you would find many others as bad, perhaps among those whom the world least suspects: think of it, you who would fain persuade yourselves that all conscience is but a dream, because you see no two men's consciences exactly alike: think of it, again, you who are inclined to dismiss such thoughts for the present quite out of your minds, in the expectation, that if needed, (as something whispers you they are greatly needed,) they will come again at a more convenient season.

Recollect, one and all, that Holy Scripture plainly teaches, that God is in these thoughts, which you

are tempted to deal so rudely with; and depend upon it, that, as no word is void which goeth forth out of His mouth, so never does He breathe a thought in any heart in vain. If we will not let it take root, and bear such fruits of holiness as He delights in, yet it will not perish for ever; it will rise up against us in judgement one day, as things, which seemed quite forgotten and gone by, sometimes come thronging into the mind; warnings neglected will return, but very likely too late to do good, and certainly not with so entire a blessing as if they had been attended to at once.

But what if any person say in his heart, "Thank God, mine is not such a case as that: I *do* vex myself when I have sinned: it is true, I break such and such a good rule continually, but I never do it without my conscience tormenting me afterwards?" This, I take it, is no uncommon case: we are too apt to do wrong, or leave undone what we know to be right, and feel a sort of disgust at ourselves afterwards for a while, and yet, the next time the temptation comes, behave no better than before: and one reason of our so going on is, because we are aware, even while we sin, that we are, and shall be, as we have been, displeased with ourselves for our sin: and "surely," says our deceitful heart, "it is better to sin and reproach one's self, than to sin and be self-satisfied." And thus it too often happens, that the only fruit of the silent misgivings, which God's Holy Spirit puts into our hearts, is our fretting for the time, and making ourselves sullen to others, and afterwards going on only the more stubbornly in our misbehaviour.

Something like this, if I mistake not, is shown to us by Holy Scripture in the case of Saul. Evidently his revenge against David was all the while, at least for a long time, accompanied with many misgivings. He vexed himself and others, he made himself miserable; but his spite and malice continued just the same.

Let us bethink ourselves of this danger; for indeed it is a sad reality, and nearer some of us than we think. Is it such a very uncommon thing, for people to be cross and unkind to whoever comes in their way, because their own consciences reprove them, and make them uncomfortable?

I wish we could recollect, when so tempted, from Whom the thoughts come, which make us uneasy in our sins. Had Saul realized to himself the presence of the all-seeing God in his heart; had he said to himself, when David's truth and loyalty made him feel ashamed of his malicious purposes, "This cometh of the Lord of Hosts; He is close to me, I will humble my heart before Him:" surely he would have found grace and strength to resist the evil spirit: surely he would not have come to so bad an end.

Let us beware how we tread in the steps of king Saul: let us well understand that our occasional fits of remorse, if we do not improve them into true repentance and amendment, are an invitation to the evil spirit to come in and make us sullen, moody, despairing. He knows, better than we do, that the first beginnings of remorse are from the Holy One; that if we do not obey them, we grieve that blessed Spirit, and drive Him, more or less, away from us:

and he, the watchful power of mischief, depend on it, is near and prompt enough, to creep in and take that room in our hearts, which we will not allow to the Divine Instructor and Peace-maker.

Or you may consider the thing in this way. Look at the case of a froward child, knowing that it is in the wrong, and therefore altogether vexed and sullen, but not yet so subdued, as quietly to own the fault, and turn over a new leaf for the time to come. Who does not know that such a child is in the worst possible way, until that evil disposition is subdued? Then, only apply the same rule, when you are examining yourself. Do not begin to flatter and soothe yourself, in the hope that your sins are not so bad as some others, because you are really annoyed and vexed with yourself for them. Such annoyance, if it do not lead you to forsake them, makes your case rather worse, being, as it is, one more warning unimproved.

I will now go on to a different case. I will suppose a person, not so much flattering himself, by a silent comparison between his own self-reproach, and the reckless daring sin of some others, as giving way to a sort of despondency, because he has often tried to repent (at least he thinks he tried) and failed. I will imagine it the hundredth, nay the thousandth time, that such and such a wicked enjoyment is before you, and you are on the point of giving way to it. Your conscience smites you and says, "hold back:" and the Evil one puts it in your heart to say, "I have tried so often before, and could not refrain, or if I have refrained for a time, I fell afterwards into the snare: and why should I think it

will be any better with me now? It is no use, I will just give myself up."

One longs, if it might be so, to find one's way to the heart and conscience of a person thus tempted, and say to him, Are you in earnest desponding? or is not your despondency just a word, by which you are permitting your enemy to impose upon you? You cannot surely despond; for you know Whom you have to deal with. The habit of sin is mighty, it is true: the tendrils of it, as of some creeping poisonous shrub, have wound themselves not only round, but into, your heart, so that it seems as if it were a part of your being; but remember, on the other side, the Hand which is laid upon you is also an Almighty one. "God is greater than your heart," and can overcome it, if you cry to Him continually, and strive as in His sight, in spite of all coldness and irksomeness. "God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things;" knoweth, better than yourself, not only the depth of the present mischief, but also what seeds of good are still within you, which His grace, would you surrender yourself to it, would surely find out and cherish, as the rain from Heaven finds out the living portions of the root of some plant, which seemed quite dead with the frost, and causes it again to bring forth and bud.

Do not despond, however often you have fallen; set your face like a flint to abstain from the evil, to resist the bad habit, this one time at least. You will feel perhaps cold and cheerless, when you have done so: never mind; take it as part of your punishment; do not set your heart on experiencing, here, that joy in God, which is the portion of the pure in

heart, you who have so sadly swerved from that high calling. Think it a great thing to be addressed, as you now are, by your conscience, or rather by God's Spirit, moving inwardly in your conscience, much in the same way which He tried in the case of a decaying Church of old: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die:" think it, I say, a great and blessed thing, that God allows you, by even so much watchfulness, to keep and strengthen that little hold you have of Him; do not give up: do not say, it is no use.

If you were a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a rock, you would not say, the hold you had of the rock was of no use to you; you would not let it go on purpose, because you had so often slipped back before. No, you would cleave to the one remaining chance; you would exert yourself, in every limb, to climb a little higher; you would know and feel that this one chance made all the difference to you, and that you could not be too thankful for it. When shall we learn something like this true sense of things, in matters which concern our everlasting life? When shall we begin to understand and lay it to heart, not merely to say over and over, that God is within us, that it is His voice, which we hear inwardly checking us in our sins: and that where His voice and word is, there is He ready and willing to save, even to the uttermost, those who have seemed to go nearest to throw themselves away? When shall we understand, that it can never be altogether in vain to obey the misgivings of conscience? that it will by God's mercy lessen punishment, even though it come too late to ripen into perfect repentance?

Wherefore, endeavouring by God's grace to guard ourselves against all these abuses of His mercy; neither to be content with ourselves, because we are uncomfortable in our sins, nor to fall back in despair, because we have so often fallen back: let us, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, set ourselves these good rules, which will enable us to make the right use of His awful and glorious presence in our very hearts.

First, let us make it a strict law to ourselves, to notice the misgivings of our conscience; not to let them pass by as in a dream, as if they meant nothing, as if they were no more than the flashings which come before the eye, when we close it very hard, and try, as it were, to gaze on darkness. Yet, even in such cases, the images which we see are real; they are the remembrance of things which have actually passed before our eyes; and so when our own heart smites us, no doubt it is a true and real thing, a touch as it were from the hand of Him, in Whose hands we are, body and soul. Let us notice and attend to it accordingly, not in a kind of distempered, passionate way, simply to torment ourselves with it, like dumb creatures when they are in pain, but like reasonable beings, who are able by such throbs of pain to guess what this sickness is, and what they must do to be healed.

And to this end, it will do us good not only to notice the misgivings of our conscience at that time, but also to recall them, put them together, compare one day's report of them with another's; just as physicians and nurses watch a disease; and to make out as we may our chief dangers, and what God would have us to do. Thus, if your own heart reprove

you at any time for being too soon angry, you will do well to remember it, not only for a little while after, but to recall it in your prayers at night, and again also the next morning: if the same thing happen the next day, then put both together and try to have a double repentance, to pray to Almighty God twice as earnestly, to watch yourself twice as attentively, to punish yourself twice as severely.

This, if any, one may believe, must be the way to make the devil leave off tempting you, when he finds that his very temptations only make you the more obedient Christian; more humble, more wary, more afraid of your favourite sin, more distrustful of yourself, more diligent in seeking God's grace, more regular in prayer and in receiving the Holy Communion. And we must needs imagine, great must be the peace, and blessed, even on earth, the condition of that soul which the devil has left off tempting, because he found it resolute in keeping God's commandments. Is it not worth all the care and pains and self-denial, if we can bring ourselves at last to anything so happy as this?

And the ready way so to do is, to train ourselves regularly, as children are trained, when we want to teach them some hard lesson, or break them of some favourite ill custom. Must we not first watch them and see what their weak points are, and bear those weak points in mind, and contrive perpetually guards and cautions against them? So must we do with ourselves. When our attention is called, by any pang of conscience, to some wrong disposition of our own, we must look to it, not once nor twice, but continually: we must make a rule of so doing, and then we

must, from time to time, put together the several hints and notices concerning ourselves, which Providence so gives us. And thus we shall come to know ourselves so well, as to be quite certain, and actually to feel in our hearts, that we cannot stand a moment without some far better strength than our own: which truth, as things now are, we are for ever acknowledging in words, but the more we talk of it, the less, too often, do some of us appear practically to bear it about with them.

For indeed this truth, the need of God's continual help, is of all truths most certain to degenerate into mere words unless it be really acted on; that is, unless those who acknowledge it really take care to behave as persons who hope God is with them, and would not for the world forfeit His aid. It follows, that in order to deal wisely with ourselves, and not to throw away God's gracious warnings, we must not only notice them at the time, and put them together, and use them as means to know ourselves by; but chiefly and above all, we must practically obey them: doing things, and leaving them undone, as our conscience warns us at the time.

And let us use ourselves to take very slight warnings; for they are not the less from God, because they touch us but softly and gently. It is not only the thunder which comes from Him, and the mighty rushing wind, but also the still small voice.

More particularly is it necessary for those who are beginning to repent, to force themselves to attend to the very faintest scruples which they really feel within them; for their hearts and minds are in some measure seared by the evil or careless ways in which

they have been living, and it may be that a great transgression, in their case, may awaken but a very slight feeling of remorse. They are like persons set to watch, who know that their hearing is imperfect, and who, therefore, ought the more wakefully to listen after the slightest sound. A man who has been used to take liberties with the property of others, his master's, his employer's, his neighbour's, or any one else; to take things without leave; to manage a bargain too much for his own advantage: such persons as these it is likely will find their consciences but very slightly galled by any single act of that kind; but they ought to account it God's warning just the same; and if they humbly and steadily set themselves to obey it, and really turn from the sin once, there is good hope that the second time the hint from above may be more distinct, and their feeling of their duty keener; and the third time still more; and so in course of years, perhaps of months, God may give them such grace, as to feel a real horror and loathing of things, which at first they could hardly understand to be wrong.

It is just the same in leaving undone what the will of God is that we should do. In going to Church, for instance, who does not see how different one man's conscience is from another's? One man is vexed, and blames himself, if a single Sunday pass without coming here; another is quite at his ease if he come when it is fine weather; one or two perhaps may be found so truly convinced of Christ's presence here, that they are more or less disquieted, if the bell ever call them to Church without their answering it: others, on the contrary, feel no particular remorse,

though months and half-years pass away, and they continue absent. Well, it is a sad thing that any should be so unfeeling as these last; but at least, at whatsoever point they *do* begin to feel a little, let them pay regard to their own feelings. If the voice within do but slightly whisper on a Sunday morning, "You ought to go," do not let it pass; do not turn away from it; let no call of pleasure, however loud, drown that low but grave admonition: for, depend upon it, it is from above, and no one can say what infinite consequences, whether for good or for evil, may arise from your obeying or stifling it.

And it is just the same with all other duties, which any one of us has hitherto unfortunately neglected. Let us be quite sure that on such things, when our own heart does begin to break silence, a very moderate condemnation from it may be taken as an earnest of a very severe one from God: and that the only chance we have of ever really conforming our wills to His in those matters, and so becoming fit for His everlasting mercy, is steadily obeying that first slight whisper, and the next to it and the next; till the stony heart by degrees be taken away, and He have given us a heart of flesh.

Observe, I have been speaking throughout of those cases, in which our conscience calls to us, however gently, yet distinctly: cases in which we have no real doubt what the Holy Spirit would have us do. There may be such a thing as a doubting conscience, when a person's mind misgives him, that on some accounts he is wrong, in doing or not doing so and so, yet he cannot quite settle the matter, putting it ever so fairly to himself. How are we to act in such

a case? Surely we must look and see on which side is most humility, most real self-denial: and if we take our part on that side, we can hardly be very wrong. Thus, when there is authority on one side, the authority of the Church, or the king, or our parents, and only some fancy of our own on the other, there humility tells us plainly on which side she will be found. Again, if in all other respects a matter seems fairly balanced, between doing a thing and not doing it, it is a good rule of Christian discipline to take that side which is least pleasant to you: dealing rather rudely with your natural self and bringing it by all means into subjection. It is safer and better on the whole, to decline some enjoyments which might perhaps be taken innocently, than to venture too near to those which, when they are conceived, bring forth sin, and when they are finished bring forth death.

I have now mentioned some of the principal rules, by which Holy Scripture and the Church of God would teach a man to make the most of the witness of his own heart; that is, of God's Holy Spirit there, condemning him. I will but add one remark, arising naturally out of the consideration of the inward warning voice, as the token and rehearsal of the great trumpet, which is soon to sound and call us all to that judgement, which will at once be outward and inward, and the event of which will be for ever. I say then, it may be well to remember, that although *we* see our sins but one by one, God sees them all together in a body; how they join to make a bad habit, and those bad habits again to make a bad character, and all the bad characters of all times and nations to make up the devil's kingdom, the mystery

of iniquity, which the Lord will destroy with the brightness of His coming. Thus God sees our sins now; and thus He will shew them, by and by, to the world and to ourselves; unless we first apply the Blood of Christ to them, by all the means of penitence and grace.

What S. James says so fearfully to certain proud covetous men, will be fulfilled quite as fearfully in all, who any how despise God's warnings within them: "Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days;" a treasure of unholy desires and evil deeds: and now, it will be heaped on you, and overwhelm you utterly. God grant us better things, things that accompany salvation; through Jesus Christ.

SERMON XV.

CONSOLATIONS OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

1 S. John iii. 21.

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

HAVING considered at large, in two former sermons, the case of people whose hearts condemn them, I wish now to consider what the blessed Apostle goes on to tell us of the contrary case; the case of people whose hearts approve and acquit them. His words seem to tell us, that here, as well as in the other case, what we perceive to be inwardly whispered is far more than a present touch of comfort or anguish, it is a true voice from Heaven, a faint token going before of what we may expect to hear openly at the last Day. It is a mysterious pledge or token, a kind of sacrament of acquittal, as the other of condemnation; and both from God.

I will endeavour now to unfold this notion, and shew more at large what I understand by it: and what Christian care is necessary to guard us from the abuses to which it is plainly liable.

All of us, it is to be hoped, know something of the testimony of a good conscience; all have some faint notion at least, what joy it is, when a man's

heart fairly tells him, "you are on the whole doing your duty: you may reasonably hope that you are in a good and a right way." Why, even in any small matter, merely concerning this world, we know what a difference it makes, when a man is quite sure he is in the right: when, as the common saying is, he can hold up his head, and look the other party in the face.

Why is this, but from an inward confidence, which all men feel, even the worst, in the strength of a good cause? They feel, in spite of themselves, that there is One above, in Whose strength that which is good and right is stronger than that which is unfair and unjust.

We are, all of us, but too apt to make the most of this feeling, when we are engaged in disputes with others; and to encourage ourselves in pride and inconsideration towards them. But surely we may, if we will, put it to a much better use. When we feel the sort of inward strength, which is given us by the consciousness that we are on the right side, in any small indifferent matter, surely we may be led to reflect upon the much greater strength and firmness of heart which it would give us, could we truly and honestly, on fair examination, feel that we are on God's side; that we are, on the whole, night and day, steadily endeavouring to do our duty and please Him in all things, in thought, word, and deed, and so to make our calling and election sure.

If, when you are disputing about some insignificant bargain, you feel so much the more courageous, as you are more certain of being in the right; think what would be the joy of heart, the rest and

calm, the quietness and confidence, did a person's conscience tell him, that he had truly and really loved knowledge, and chosen the fear of the Lord all his days; could he humbly, yet reasonably and really, take to himself the promises in the Book of Proverbs: "^aWhoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil. Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shalt not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken."

All which are summed up in that one gracious promise of our Lord: "^bWhosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like unto a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock."

These are the words of our Saviour and Judge. Surely they speak of something real, not of a mere representation, of a state of things too happy for any one here on earth to obtain. Surely it were a great pity, were any Christian soul to imagine, that it is in vain for a man to strive after this testimony of a good conscience, this acquittal of his own heart, because there are other texts, which, speaking of such as never came to Christ, say that "every imagination of the thoughts of *their* heart is only evil continually;"

^a Prov. i. 33. ii. 11. iii. 23—26.

^b S. Luke vi. 47. 48.

that “*their* heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:” or again, because S. James says, “that in many things we offend all:” and S. Paul, that his knowing no harm of himself in his office as a Christian minister did by no means justify him, he must wait for Christ’s judgement. Undoubtedly these things are written in Scripture, and are to be considered by us: but they cannot be intended to do away with the effect of our Lord’s plain words, assuring us, that doing His will, or not doing it, is that on which, to us His disciples, every thing entirely depends.

What use then, some one will say, are we to make of such texts as these, describing so earnestly the wickedness of the natural heart, and the weakness even of that which is regenerate?

Why, in the first place, they remind us, that whatever portion we have in the testimony of a good conscience, is not our own, but the gracious gift of Him, Who having united us to His Son by His Holy Spirit, has thereby given us power to become like that Son, to do things which are really good and acceptable in His sight; to have holy desires, good counsels, and just works; to purify ourselves even as He is pure.

In the next place, these texts teach us to be very much afraid of ourselves, as knowing that the seed of mischief, natural corruption, still remains in us, though united to Christ, and will spring up and bear fruit, if we be not careful to mortify it by strict obedience and continual seeking for grace. In this manner we may bear in mind, and use to a godly and religious purpose, the sad truths, that we are

naturally corrupt, and even as Christians, full of infirmity. These things we may sadly remember, and yet not lose the comfortable hope of a good conscience and of joy in God, which our Lord Himself in so many places so graciously offers to us. Whatever fruit in holiness a Christian man has, he knows it is not his own; he knows it is and must be blemished with many infirmities. Yet since, being born again in baptism, he knows that he has come to Christ; if his conscience tell him that he has not wilfully gone on in disobedience to Christ, he may with trembling hope and fearful joy accept that comfortable witness, and use it as an encouragement to stand firm on the rock, whereon our Saviour has set him.

In this way, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God; a sort of freedom of speech towards Him; the will, and the power too, to cast all our care upon Him, and open to Him all our hearts, not as servants merely to a master whom they respect, but as children to a most kind and condescending father. This would be the natural and ordinary fruit of Christian obedience, continued from baptism unto death.

And it has this great and peculiar blessing, that instead of decaying and wasting away, like mere feelings and impressions, as people grow older, it becomes the stronger, and is felt the more deeply, for every year of sincere and continued obedience. Of which S. Paul is a remarkable instance: concerning whom it has been well observed, how his manner of speaking of his own spiritual condition, on writing to Timothy his friend, close upon his death, differs from that which he adopted, years before, writing to

the whole Church of the Corinthians. His earlier tone was “^cI keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway:” and again, “^dI know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified:” and again, some years later, speaking to the Philippians, “^eI follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of my high calling in Christ Jesus.”

Now listen to him a few years later still, when in prison, and aware that the crown of martyrdom was just about to descend upon his head. “^fI am now,” he cries out to Timothy, “ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.” And just at the end of the same letter, “^gThe Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom.”

Thus, S. Paul’s heart daily acquitting him, as he daily disciplined and examined it, his confidence towards God grew steadier and steadier, and he was enabled, not doubtingly, yet with deep humility, to rehearse to himself that comfortable sentence, which

^c 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 4.

^e Phil. iii. 12—14.

^f 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

^g Ib. 18.

he, and all who resemble him, will hear from the Judge in the great day.

It is then possible for a Christian person, even from the day of his baptism, to walk stedfastly with his God and Saviour. And it is no mere imagination but a blessed reality, that when such a person's conscience tells him what his life has been, and bids him look forward with humble hope, that comfortable voice is as it were the echo, the repetition of the judgement, which the all-seeing God is at the same time passing in Heaven, on the same person's conduct. I wish this were more thought of than it is. I wish people could be brought to consider, that conscience is a sacred word, and is not to be used lightly, seeing that it means, in reality, God speaking in our hearts. I wish even serious and well disposed people could be brought to think more deeply than they do, of the witness of their own heart in their favour; as being a token of the Almighty's Presence, of their present communion with Him, and of the infinite danger they will be in, if they now suffer themselves to relax their endeavours; if, instead of going on from good to better, they permit their enemy to take their crown; as for instance, by becoming proud, or slothful, or by putting trust in themselves.

Or suppose we look at the thing in this way. You know our Lord has promised, that at the last day, all who have been trusted by Him, and have duly improved their talents, shall hear the blessed and comfortable sentence, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: en-

ter thou into the joy of thy Lord:" and I should suppose there are few persons, at all used to read or hear the Scriptures, with attention, who have not before now felt their hearts in a manner thrill at the reading of that sentence, with earnest thought of the joy it will be, if ever, by God's infinite mercy through Christ, those words should be spoken to them. Now what I want you to reflect upon is, that those very words of grace and acceptance are in a manner spoken to you by God Almighty, as often as your conscience, fairly and seriously consulted, tells you that you have really been leading your life, in some tolerable measure, by the rule of Christ's holy commandments: that you have kept yourself, by God's mercy, from every kind of wilful sin, and also wilful neglect of His known will.

Every such testimony of your conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity you have tried to obey the Gospel of Christ, is an earnest of what you may hope for at the day of judgement: not a final earnest; for you are yet in a world of trial, and it is but too possible for you to fall away;—not a full assurance, for you are yet on earth, and full assurance belongs to paradise: yet is an approving conscience, for the time, an earnest and token of that blessing, which our Lord shall pronounce from His throne of glory to all that love and fear Him. One month of your life, spent so that your conscience is really void of offence towards God and towards man, will give you a glimpse of that last and infinite blessing; one year will give you a better hope; and every fresh year month week and day will, by God's mercy, add something to your comfortable and earnest expecta-

tion ; till a contented old age, following on a pure and devout, and charitable life, dismiss the servant of Christ, ripe to his reward, as a shock of corn cometh in his season.

Such is the consolation of a good conscience, considered as an earnest of the sentence which our Lord will bless you with at the last day : and it is also no small encouragement, when we look at it as a token and sign of good men and good angels approving. Good angels, we have reason to believe, are never far off from us, as long as we are trying to serve God in earnest : and it is a real joy to one who remembers this, when he can hope that his conduct in secret has been such as they delight and rejoice in.

Again, since one man's heart is made to answer to that of another, and we are never quite happy without some sort of fellow-feeling on the part of our brethren ; I suppose one may reasonably account it among the privileges of a good conscience, that we know we have on our side, in reality, though in secret, and perhaps without their being any of them aware of it, the whole body of the saints, living and dead : they are as a cloud of witnesses compassing us around : we are cheered, for example, with the thought, that if our parents or dear friends who are gone could know how we are going on, it would gladden them ; we are inspirited, especially in those duties which few care for in our time, by the assurance that holy men of old, if they could be aware of it, would say we were right. Thus a good conscience is an unspeakable comfort, as a token that we are not alone in the world ; that we have what nature instinctively feels after, the sympathy and favour

of all good spirits, as well as that of the Almighty Creator Himself.

But of all the privileges of a conscience thus void of offence, the one which I suppose would come most immediately home to any person, is that which S. John himself goes on to mention. After declaring, that "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God," he adds, that "whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight." That is, such a conscience warrants a person in a cheerful hope, that God will hear and grant his prayers, for our Saviour's sake, according to that promise by S. James, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." God will hear and grant his prayers, by giving him the very thing he asks for, or something better: as on the other hand, He denies the prayers of the wicked and double-minded, of those who pray one way and live another, even when He seems to grant them.

Therefore the remembrance of a life well spent, and a heart carefully guarded and kept pure, is the greatest possible help in our devotions to God. Many of us unfortunately may but too well understand this, by our sad experience of the effect of impure, discontented, envious, or worldly thoughts. If ever any man have been used to give way to such thoughts, how sadly do they haunt him in his very prayers, and that for a long time after, though he try, never so sincerely, to repent in earnest, and rid himself of them.

From this even very imperfect and ordinary persons may a little understand how blessed a thing it would be, to have one's memory stored with recollections of

a different sort, with a treasure of pure and holy desires and deeds; to be such as Abraham, whose long life of faith and resignation prepared him to stand in his old age before the Lord as a friend, and to offer up those earnest prayers for Sodom which, though they could not save the place, yet saved Lot and his family, the only persons, as it should seem, who at all feared God in the place. Or such as Daniel, whose fasting and faith and prayer, were rewarded with that, which we do not read was ever given to any other saint; a positive promise of salvation in the great day. Or such as the great and holy Apostle, who prayed that his thorn in the flesh might be taken away, and received in answer this greater blessing; that he learned of Christ Himself to rejoice in his infirmity, and was assured of the power of his Lord resting upon him.

Of such blessed returns of prayer, however far from our own experience, we may yet form some notion, by observing how much our own shameful recollections too evidently have to do with our own languid and seemingly fruitless prayers; even as our Church teaches in the collect for this week. Our devotions, like the rest of the race which is set before us, are sore let and hindered by our manifold sins and wickedness. It is sad and painful, but too true: God grant it may humble us in earnest; God grant, that though it be too late for our prayers to be the prayers of saints, they yet may be the prayers of penitents: that although we, wilfully as we have transgressed, too many of us, since our baptism, dare not hope by our prayers to remove mountains, to save the sick, to ask what we will and have it granted:

we may yet so pray, and so live, as not to fail in the great point of all; in this world, knowledge of God's truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting.

But as to those of whom S. John speaks in the text, who have either not so fallen, or whose repentance has come so quickly and effectually after their fall, that the scar and wound of their conscience is well nigh worn out by much grace and long perseverance: we have seen how much greater and better than a little present comfort the blessing is which they enjoy, in their hearts not condemning them. It is a signal of present favour from God in Heaven: an earnest of future acquittal from our Lord Jesus Christ; a token that angels and saints, known and unknown, are on their side and in communion with them; finally, a pledge that God's ear is open to their prayers, and whatsoever they ask they shall receive of Him.

Now the higher and holier thing a good conscience is, the more needful it is for us to be careful, that we do not mistake our own case, and imagine we have that blessing, when in fact we have not. The more divine and perfect is "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," the more the pity and the loss, should it turn out at last, that any one of us has mistaken a false peace for that most heavenly gift. And certainly there must be no small danger of it; else the Prophet would not so earnestly have warned God's people, of some who speak peace when there is no peace: neither would our Lord so emphatically have warned us, of many who shall draw near to Him, crying out, Lord, Lord, and fancying they have the

peace of God, when yet they are such as He never knew, and He will bid them depart from Him.

But there is no time now to speak in particular of these false kinds of peace. Only one general rule God has given, which will suffice for all who have in their minds anything like a true fear of Him; “^h There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked.” He that is wilfully breaking any of God’s holy commandments, may seem to be quiet both within and without, may have no vexing thoughts, may live and die undisturbed, may even feel sure of salvation; but he has not the peace of God. Christ will not, when He shews Himself to them, address them with that gracious salutation, which sealed His pardon to His true disciples, when they first saw Him after He was risen. “They were terrified and affrighted,” but He, the great High Priest, presently assured them of His perfect absolution; saying unto them, once and again, “Peace be unto you.”

And however He may, for our manifold sins, leave us here in doubt and anguish, yet let us so truly repent, that it may please Him in like manner to speak peace to us, when we too shall behold Him in His glory. And let not that peace on earth, which was solemnly proclaimed to all at this blessed time, be forfeited by any one here continuing in his sin, after so many warnings.

^h Isa. xlviii. 22.

SERMON XVI.

EACH HIS OWN JUDGE, AND NOT ANOTHER'S.

Rom. xiv. 12.

“So then every man must give account of himself unto God.”

THE time of Advent has always been accounted a penitential time in the Church of God: a time to mingle much fear and trembling with our joy: a time in which Christians should retire as they best may from the world, and give themselves up to serious thought, trying to be alone with God.

And there is a plain reason why it should be so. The holy feast of Christmas, to which we are approaching, brings men so very near to the Most High, that all devout and faithful souls have ever felt that it needed some special preparation: much in the same way as the other time of Easter has Lent going before it. We must judge ourselves, that we may be worthy to receive God Incarnate in the Holy Communion, when we are permitted to keep His birthday: we must judge ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord.

If those who are to obtain some great favour of an earthly king or queen are expected to kneel on their knees to receive it, should not we, who hope to be

partakers of our Lord's Body and Blood on that solemn occasion, cast ourselves beforehand on the knees of our hearts? And this cannot be done in a moment; it *must* require some considerable time: there must be many prayers, much self-examination, many earnest thoughts of God's presence, and how we stand in His sight: and since this cannot be, while we give ourselves up to the ordinary thoughts, and pursuits, and pleasures of the world, this time of preparation must also be a time of self-denial. There must be more or less of fasting, of abstinence, of continence: the bridegroom must go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet; men should be for a time like Daniel, eating not willingly any pleasant bread; otherwise how can they expect that their prayers should be answered, as Daniel's, by the coming of an angel, nay, of the Lord of angels?

To bring her children into this mind, the Church sets before us the great Day of the Lord as the continual subject of our meditation for a full month, or near it, before Christmas day. Advent goes before Christmas: the second coming of our Lord must be in our minds to prepare us for duly regarding His first coming.

The lessons, therefore, and collects set down in the Prayer Book for these four weeks all look that way. They are all meant to keep up in the minds of Christians the awful image of our Lord coming in the clouds, with His glorious Body, yet bearing the marks of the Cross; of the angels around Him; of the world burning under His feet; of the dead, small and great, standing before Him; of the judgment set, and of the books opened.

One might expect these thoughts to be found too overwhelming, too full of anxious astonishment; so that persons' minds, if they really believe the Bible, would be, if possible, too entirely occupied with them. One would not wonder, if in deep care about these fearful events, so soon to happen to us all, some should altogether forget their worldly business, and need to be awakened, like a person in an amazing dream. But, alas! the difficulty with almost all of us is quite the other way. Our hearts, in regard of heavenly things, are so unspeakably cold, so hard and dry, that we cannot, without some unusual effort, so much as meditate on the Last Day for ever so few minutes together. And when we do, how little does it really affect us, in comparison of any thing in this world, which comes home to our bosoms! How soon, how readily, do we start back to trifles and transitory things! and how lightly do we forget the astounding visions which the holy book sets before us!

It is a sad and humbling thought, how little we have really had the Last Judgement in our minds: but He can help us to do better, and He *will* help us if we try in earnest.

Surely His words are plain enough, if we will but have the heart to attend to them. "As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself unto God." What can be plainer or more alarming?

Every one must give account: all without exception: neither man woman nor child, that at all knows right from wrong, will be excused from answering on that day.

We must give account *to God*: not to man whom we might deceive, or who might judge of us by false measures, but to the all-seeing unerring God.

And we must give account *of ourselves*: not of others, but of our own conduct, of the whole of it, in thought, word, and deed.

Let us dwell for a while on each of these terrible truths: we know them all perfectly well; but to have them deep and present in our hearts is a great grace, which we must pray and labour after.

Recollect then, first, that we shall *every one* give account. This seems especially addressed to the inconsiderate and lighthearted; to those who say to themselves, "To-morrow shall be as this day and yet more abundant." Too many go on always, nearly all go on at times, as if they were not really accountable. They just take the pleasure or the profit of the moment, and think no more of it; it is to them no more than throwing a stone into the water, which comes together again, and all seems as before. If we did not go on like this, could we possibly forget and neglect to examine ourselves so thoroughly as many of us have done? Could we have gone on for months and years, lying down and rising up, with no serious endeavour to know how we have been wrong, and how we may do better? When things go wrong, when others provoke us, then the notion is ready enough at hand that they have sinned, that *their* account will be heavy; but we are very slow to comprehend the same thing as it concerns ourselves. The hours are cheerful or melancholy to us, we are sorry or glad as they pass, but it seldom comes into our minds that we shall see

those hours again, that their shadows will, as it were, meet us at the Day of judgement, and help to determine what will become of us. We say or sing to our Lord daily, "We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge:" but when we go out of Church, our behaviour too often shews as if we believed Him indeed a Judge to other men, but to ourselves accounted Him as a partial Friend, willingly deceived, and sure to make the best of our case.

Recollect, in the second place, that we must account for our doings to God; not to a mortal like ourselves, whom we might deceive or escape, but to the God Who seeth in secret, and to Whom the darkness and light are both alike. Men say to themselves, Why should I fear? no man sees me; I shall never be found out or suspected; and if it be wrong, I shall have time to repent: they are surprised into such thoughts early, and too often the Evil one gets an advantage over them, which they never can be rid of during their whole life.

Yet if, being a servant, you knew that at night you were to be called to account by the strictest of masters, and that there was no chance of your hiding any thing from him, this would surely make you particular and exact in all your dealings. If you were a scholar, and had a lesson to learn for a master who would be sure to take notice of every word, would you not try to learn it perfectly?

Nor let any man say in his heart, After all, my service will be full of blemishes; the best lesson I can say full of mistakes; therefore it is not worth while trying at all. We do not so with our earthly masters and teachers: we know they will be better

pleased with us if we do some things right, than if we neglect it all. Indeed, that is the very case of the unprofitable servant: he was accounted wicked and slothful, because, knowing that he had but one talent, instead of trying to make something of it, he went and hid it in the earth. He did so, because he had no faith, no love for his master; but never let it be said that we did so, we who know how considerate our Master is to the lowest of His servants; who have heard the gracious words, "She hath done what she could."

Thirdly, every one of us must give an account unto God *of himself*—of himself, not of another. In the Day of Judgement we shall be all present, all the children of Adam, not one left out. And Christ also will make Himself present to each of us, and we shall have to confess ourselves to Him, in a way which we cannot yet imagine. And what shall we confess? Not our neighbour's sins, but our own; not our own good deeds, but God's infinite mercies.

Each will give account of himself: it is so plain that all must at once agree to it; but few bring it home, really, to their own hearts. Most men permit themselves to go on, both in thinking and in talking, as if they were to give account of others, not of themselves. Let a minister of Christ go and talk to them on the state of their souls; when they speak of their past lives, very often the conversation gradually passes away to some ill conduct of some other person; on whom they choose, perhaps, to lay the blame of their old sins; and when you go away from them, you will be amazed to perceive, on recollection, how little they have spoken as penitents,

how much as finding fault. A triumph indeed for Satan, and a miserable thing for the souls he wishes to ruin, that the precious moments and helps allowed them for making their own hearts better, they cast away in judging and blaming others.

But so it is in all companies. Which of us can deny it? Go where you will, where two or three are met together, what other thing do they talk of, generally speaking, so much as the errors and defects of their brethren? It is not always, nor for the most part, "*ill-nature*:" they mean no harm by it, but only just to pass away the time. But surely it betokens a sad ignorance of what their task and place is: worse than if a sick man, wanting advice, told the physician of nothing but other men's infirmities.

A sadder reflection still is, when we come to think of the effect which such a way of talking must have on a person's most secret thoughts, and direct confessions to God. You are used, wherever you go, to talk freely of other men's lives, of their good and evil, of their skill and foolishness; you say what you have heard, or what you think; it amuses you and others, or it helps on some matter of business, and there is an end. By and by you go home, the noise of company ceases, you are alone with your God, and you begin to commune with your heart and in your chamber. But the habit you have practised in company, of censuring and judging others rather than yourself, still keeps hold on you; while on your very knees to confess to God, it interferes to make you less humble; your thoughts wander to transgressions of your brethren, and you wonder

if they are not worse than your own; or you permit yourself to lay the blame of your old wilful sins on parents, or companions, or nurses, or bad friends, or tempters, or on any one rather than where it should be laid.

Thus the habit of judging others will lose us great part of the blessing of humble prayer. We know of one whose devotions were utterly spoiled by it: one who should have been confessing and bewailing his sins, and instead of that was thanking God that he was "not as other men are;" and so miserably was he enslaved to the wretched habit of censoriousness, that he let it come into his very addresses to God; "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, nor even as this publican."

Observe here also how this evil custom loses us entirely the blessing of the forgiveness of sins. The Publican went down to his house justified; not so the Pharisee. Why? Because the Publican, really believing and remembering that he must give account, thought only of his own sins, to confess and abhor them. But the Pharisee, like too many, forgetting that he too must be judged, went off to think of the sins of the other person, whom he saw praying at a distance.

The Pharisee's words are too shocking when they are spoken; our very hearts rise against them. But I fear that, as *thoughts*, they are too common in our Churches; and thoughts before God, remember, are as words and deeds, and, if indulged, are set down in His Book, and will meet us again in the day when that Book is opened. May He of His infinite mercy grant that none of us may lose the benefit of our

seeming repentance, by mixing with it this sad way of dwelling on other men's faults rather than our own !

Let us remember the unmerciful servant. His selfish heart was so set upon the miserable hundred pence which his fellow-servant owed him, that he quite forgot the ten thousand talents which his master had just forgiven him. He is set before us as an *extreme* instance of what that kind of temper may come to ; but we go some little way towards him, every time we at all give in to the habit of going off to other's transgressions, whether against ourselves or against God, when we ought to be thinking of our own.

Our business, then, is to check and put down such thoughts, as we would any other bad thoughts, whenever they intrude themselves. We cannot always help their coming into our minds ; but we can help encouraging them and consenting to have them remain there. Say to them, "Get thee behind me, Satan ; out of my heart, thou proud and uncharitable dream ;" and there is a Friend close at hand, the Holy Spirit in our very souls and bodies, Who will surely help us to drive them out. They will be slower in returning, and will the sooner leave us again.

Here it may be asked, What ? are we to have no thoughts nor words at all about other men's sins ? how can we possibly help it ?

The answer is plain, from this same place of S. Paul : "Let us not judge one another any more ; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion of offence, in his brother's way." We may think of and mourn over the faults and errors of

our brethren, if we be careful always to season the thought with the bitter consciousness that we ourselves are, in some measure, God knows how far, but surely we are in some measure, answerable for them. For such is the near connexion of the members of Christ one with another, that no one Christian can sin, without cause for fear in every other Christian, that he has given occasion to that sin; if in no other way, at least by not praying for all so well as he might have done, or by not living so as to have his prayers heard.

But, indeed, with respect to most of our evil speakings and rash judgements, the complaint may plainly be brought far more nearly home. Take, for example, any of the relations of life: suppose a Minister with his people. When we see things going wrong among you, the commandments of God broken, and the faith slighted, we are tempted to judge harshly; to say, "Never was such an ungodly set of people," and the like. But what would S. Paul say, were he by to give us advice? "Retire, O shepherd, into thyself, and see whether the blame be not in thine own negligence or sloth; thine own manifold defects in one sort or another."

On the other hand, should the flock in any case be tempted to have bitter thoughts of the shepherd, then again the word of piety and charity is, "For our sins, most likely, God has permitted this cloud to come over him whom He has set over us: by His grace we will search them out immediately, and turn from them with all our hearts."

And it is just the same in all other relations of life. Husbands and wives, parents and children, mas-

ters and servants, employers and labourers : what so common as for each sort to be much taken up with saying and thinking, how ill the other sort behave to them ? What plainer truth than this, that if each sort would mend its own faults and leave the other alone, all by God's blessing would go right ? And it would greatly help to this, if they would seriously consider, that their neighbour seldom goes wrong, without some error, more or less, of their own. If the rich, for example, are hard or careless, they help to render the poor dishonest and discontented ; and if the poor are dishonest and discontented, they tempt the rich to be hard and careless about them. And so in the other cases which I have mentioned. Take your own share of the blame ; mend that, and leave the event to God.

There is one very serious thought, which in all our judgements and words about others we shall do well to take with us ; and it is this : Supposing our complaint and blame against them ever so just, what good will it do us in the Last Day, to have brooded over it, and thought much of it ? But if we have tried to judge brotherly of them, and rather to lay the blame on ourselves, there are very gracious promises for us. "If we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged :"—"If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

SERMON XVII.

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB.

REV. vi. 16, 17.

“Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great Day of His Wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

UNDOUBTEDLY there can be no comfort for any of the sinful race of Adam, in thinking on that last awful Day, but only in the Judge's great and unspeakable mercy. “In many things we offend all:” it was the confession of one of the greatest of saints; and another, even our Lord's own beloved and virgin disciple, now in his very old age, and on the point of departing to that bosom, where all his happiness lay, S. John the Divine wrote, for himself and for us, these words of solemn confession: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

The most perfect, then, as he is in himself, could not stand upright before our Lord's judgement seat: and yet we know that some *will* stand upright: some *will* have confidence, and be able to stand before Him. Some there are whom He Himself encourages, when they see the signs of that day, to

“look up, and lift up their heads, for their redemption draweth nigh.” And this, while the generality of men, “all the tribes of the earth,” are mourning.

As it is in that fearful vision, out of which the text was read to you : when the astonishing tokens of the end of the world, so long prophesied, come really to be fulfilled—when the sun shall have become black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall have become as blood, and the stars of heaven shall have fallen to the earth, and the heaven itself departed as a scroll that is rolled together, and every mountain and island be removed out of their places:—in that hour, the Apostle saw how “the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man,” shall “hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Wrath of the Lamb : for the great Day of His Wrath is come ; and who shall be able to stand ?”

What is the cause of this great difference ? How is it, that while some are thus ready to sink into the earth, others will be found earnestly expecting and waiting for the same awful vision, “looking for and hastening unto the coming of the Day of God ?” It is not, that some are sinners and some not : “for all,” we are distinctly told, “have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” All are naturally sinners : not one could stand in that day by his own strength.

All are naturally sinners : but when our Lord makes us members of Himself, He lifts us into a

higher state than that in which we naturally are : and by the grace which belongs to that state we may keep our vows here, and stand upright in the great Day : just as a young child, if left to itself, will fall ; but if the nurse or parent reach out a hand, then it may, if it will, keep its footing.

All, then, will depend, in that dreadful hour, upon our having or not having the portion in Christ Jesus, which He mercifully gave us at our Baptism. Happiest of all will be those, who have not only never forfeited that grace, but by holy and entire obedience have cherished and increased it, ever striving to be more and more perfect. Such as the Apostle saw in his vision, standing with the Lamb, having the Father's name written in their foreheads, and heard concerning them, "^aThey are not defiled with women, for they are virgins: they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth: in their mouth is found no guile: they are without fault before the throne of God." Those are the most glorious Saints ; such as the blessed Virgin Mary ; such as S. Paul after his conversion. But there are also, though fewer, penitent Saints: souls and bodies which have seriously fallen away from the justifying grace and pardon received in their Baptism, yet by His distinguishing mercy they have so far recovered themselves, as to become high and eminent, and what our Saviour calls "perfect."

And besides these, who will in some manner be so especially honoured in Christ's coming, that they "shall sit on thrones, judging" the world with Him, there will be the whole number of such good Christians as we commonly see in the world; persons

^a Rev. xiv. 4, 5.

who have offended, more or less grievously ; who have sinned quite enough to forfeit their baptismal covenant, but to whom He hath proved Himself not extreme to mark what is done amiss. For all their grievous transgressions, He offers them repentance : offers it for His Son's sake, and in remembrance of His Son's prayer, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." If they accept His offer, not in word only but in power : if they not only say they are sorry, but really repent, and do works meet for repentance : then the blessed Image of Christ Jesus, which they received at the font and which their sins had defaced, will be restored, and with that image they will meet Him. He, seeing His own mark and token, His Cross in their foreheads, His likeness in their hearts, will forgive them, not in part, but altogether ; not for some of their transgressions, but for all ; not for a time, but for ever.

In these ways, and these only, may a sinner hope to stand upright in our Lord's judgement ; either as having kept his first baptismal vows, or as having recovered His grace and blessing, after it had been forfeited by his wilful sins.

But if both these conditions be wanting, then will follow that worst of miseries, which the text mentions under the title of the Wrath of the Lamb : " Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Wrath of the Lamb ; for the great Day of His Wrath is come ; and who shall be able to stand ?" There is especial stress laid upon this : that they who rise on that day to shame and everlasting confusion will shrink especially from " the Wrath of the Lamb."

“The Wrath of the Lamb” is the anger of Jesus Christ; of Jesus Christ crucified; of Jesus Christ offered for our sins; of Jesus Christ offered for us, but coming to visit us, and finding Himself rejected by us. He is our only refuge, in heaven and in earth, against all other wrath. Be it either the wrath of evil spirits, lying in wait to destroy us; or of good and holy beings, drawing back from us; or of the Most Holy God, Who is of purer eyes than to behold and bear with our iniquity;—Christ crucified for us, and joining us to Himself, is the one only shelter and help against it. He binds the Devil and his angels, that they may not tear us in pieces, as they long to do every moment. He fills the Angels and Saints in heaven, and all good Christians here in His Church on earth, with tender anxious care for His sinful creatures, causing them to pray for us more and more earnestly, and obtain for us those blessings, which in a mysterious and wonderful manner He has made to depend on their prayers. And what is more than all, He, in His own Person, intercedes with His Father for us. He stands at the Right Hand of God, to succour all who mourn earnestly for their sins. He says to the Almighty Father, “Let them alone for so long a time, till I shall have given them yet more of My gracious calls, yet more chances to repent.” He is our Advocate, pleading for us the merit of that most precious Sacrifice which He made for us on the Cross. When the devil accuses, He stands by to speak for us.

Thus in every way the Lamb of God is the only help of sinners against wrath. If, then, He be made finally angry, what hope remains? There is none.

If we in persevering impenitence cast Him away, sinning on wilfully and stubbornly, “^bafter we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation.”

As if the young man, in our Lord’s Parable of the Prodigal Son, had stopped short in his journey towards his father’s house, and had turned his face back again toward his old sins, and then his father had come suddenly upon him, not in forgiveness, to fall on his neck and kiss him, but in stern wrath, not even permitting him to say any words of penitence: how miserably certain would the son be, that he was utterly cast off, that his last hope was over!

Or, as our Lord Himself has described the king, when the unmerciful servant was brought before him, delivering him over for ever to the tormentors. His former love and pity in such case would only make His present anger more dreadful. He forgave the former debt, the ten thousand talents, at once, when He was humbly desired. This shewed how ready He is to forgive, how willing to pardon, how He takes delight in shewing mercy. When you see such an one afterwards wroth, and delivering the guilty to the tormentors, you may be quite sure that there is some great reason, part of His everlasting ordinances, which makes it impossible for Him to forgive; if the word “impossible” may be used, when we are speaking of the doings of the Almighty.

By such thoughts as these the Merciful Redeemer would have us understand, and never forget, that although He is very long-suffering, yet there will be

^b Heb. x. 26.

a time when He will no longer forgive. The lamb, the dove, the worm, the meekest and most helpless of beings, may be moved to something like anger, if one go on wilfully tormenting and affronting them; so this meek Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sin of the world, may be made angry against the time when He shall come to be our Judge.

And if He be angry then, He will continue so for ever. There is no wrath like His wrath: to use an old saying, it is "as if water choked a man:" what else can he drink? "Lord, to whom shall we go?" said S. Peter, in the name of all believers, "Thou hast the words of eternal life:" and no less surely hath He the words of eternal death likewise, if we go to Him hypocritically, or do not go to Him at all. If men so behave as to turn love itself into hate, what chance is there of mercy?

Here in this world, even to the worst of sinners, even when we most feel the Lord's anger, there is, however, this comfort: that such as are taught of God, all good Christians around us, love and pray for us; they do not give us up: and we know that Christ puts it in their hearts so to do. But in that day, when the Wrath of the Lamb shall finally go out against the impenitent, not even any such comfort will remain: their best and dearest friends will abhor them. We cannot understand how, but somehow so it will be, that such as are now most inclined to pity and pray for the impenitent, will then quite leave off their compassion and their prayers. He Who is the Fountain of all goodness, will no longer put it into the hearts of His Saints to remember and intercede for those who are against Him: so much worse and

more entire will be the desolation of wicked hearts in that Day, than any thing which we can now experience or imagine.

The very sight of Christ, which is the happiness of the just, will be to them misery and torment unspeakable. "They will say to the rocks and mountains, Fall on us, and hide us." In His light the Saints see light: but to His enemies the same light is a fire going before Him, and burning them on every side.

How miserable is it, when we have done amiss, to look on the countenance of some dear and good friend, parent, brother, wife, sister, or husband, and see it changed towards us in consequence of our evil doings! or what perhaps is even sharper to bear, to those who have any good left in their hearts, how miserable to see our dearest friends going on and treating us with unaltered, undoubting love, when we know all the time how guilty we are towards them, and have not yet the heart earnestly to repent of our fault!

Something like these things, but infinitely bitterer, will be the sight "of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," when the wicked come to see it in the last day. They will not be able to endure it; they will try to hide their face from Him, as they have so often tried before; but it will be all in vain: they will still look on Him, and still be unable to bear the look; and no wonder, for the words with which He will meet their look will be "the terrible words of most just judgement, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.'"

If "^d Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God;" if Daniel and S. John fell down at His

feet as dead ; if S. Peter sank on his knees, crying, “^eDepart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,” His glory being too bright even for the purest and best of the Saints ; what must wretched sinners expect, who have never used themselves to draw near Him in prayer, and so by degrees learned to bear His light ? How intolerable the agony, when people’s eyes are fully and for ever opened to the dreadful secrets of eternity, without their being strengthened by the grace of God to endure it !

Let us endeavour, by such thoughts as these, and by all the fearful pictures of the Last Day which the Book of God in so many places sets before us, let us endeavour to learn the true fear of God, serious fear, lest by our ill doing we forfeit our portion in Christ, and force Him, Whose we are, to look strange upon us at the Last Day. We think, perhaps, that we truly trust in Him ; but what if He should say, “I never knew you ?” what if He should say, “^fHow camest thou in hither ?” what if He should say, “^gThou wicked and slothful servant ?”

When we are truly and deeply touched with love and affection for any person, we naturally observe what things most anger and displease him, and keep ourselves with especial care from all such things. Observe we, then, carefully what Holy Scripture tells us of the things which especially make our Lord angry. Whatever we do, let us watch against those things. They are three especially, hypocrisy, pride, unmercifulness. We know how He spoke of the Scribes and Pharisees ; how often He uttered a woe against them, because of their falseness and hypo-

^e S. Luke v. 8.^f S. Matt. xxii. 12.^g Ib. xxv. 26.

crisy. Always when He uses the word hypocrite, the Gospel seems to bring with it the very tones of His reproving voice, that “^hword, quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, which pierceth even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” How does that voice seem to pierce into our consciences, when we read or hear such a sentence as this, “ⁱThou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye!” And again, “^kWell hath Esaias prophesied of you, hypocrites, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.” Which of us does not at once understand, by such sentences as these, how foolish it is to deal deceitfully with our Lord? how such as do so may expect to find His face turned towards them in more especial indignation?

But again, pride, and hard and oppressive conduct towards those whom Providence has any way put in our power, is mentioned in the Gospel as the one thing, which particularly moved the wrath of our gracious Saviour in the days of His flesh. There is hardly more than one place, that I remember, in which it is said that Jesus Christ was angry. He was in a synagogue on the Sabbath day, and there was a man which had a withered hand, and our Lord’s enemies were watching Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse

^h Heb. iv. 12.

ⁱ S. Matt. vii. 5.

^k Ib. xv. 7, 8, S. Mark vii. 6.

Him. He asked them a question which they could not answer without owning themselves in the wrong; and when they held their peace, "¹He looked about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts." As in another place, when He had laid hands on a woman bowed down with infirmity, and the ruler of the synagogue had reprovèd her with anger for coming to be healed on the Sabbath day, the Lord answered by calling him "^mhypocrite," and reprovèd him severely for his hardness to the poor woman. By this we may judge, what sort of a look He will wear at the Last Day towards oppressors, and such as do wrong to the helpless, and grudge their neighbours His blessing: especially if they add to such behaviour any especial pretence of piety and devotion.

Once more: we understand by the parable of the unforgiving servant, that unmercifulness is a great cause of the wrath of the Lamb. He Who forgives all, and died that all might be forgiven, He cannot endure that those whom He has pardoned should refuse to pardon in their turn. The servant, who having been let go himself, dealt hardly with his fellow servant, forfeited the whole pardon which he had received. "ⁿHis Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due unto him."

These sayings of the Gospel are as so many glimpses of the wrath to come at the Last Day on the hypocritical, the oppressive, the unforgiving: and by the same rule they are tokens of His mercy to such as deal truly with Him, gently with their inferiors,

¹ S. Mark iii. 5. ^m S. Luke xiii. 15. ⁿ S. Matt. xviii. 34.

mercifully with their enemies. "Now ye are commanded, this do ye:" remember those sins especially in your Advent and Christmas self-examinations: watch, and pray, and strive, that you may not be Pharisees in His sight; in all things labour to be true and loving both towards Him, and towards one another: that so, when you rise from your grave, you may see the light of His countenance lifted up upon you: and while the impenitent are vainly calling on the rocks and hills to cover them, you, gazing stedfastly on the Son of Man, may feel yourself changed into the likeness of His glorious Body, and be caught up to meet Him in the air, and so for ever be with Him. For "°there is mercy with Thee," saith the Psalmist, "therefore shalt Thou be feared." Fear Him now, that you may find mercy with Him in that day.

° Ps. cxxx. 4.

SERMON XVIII.

OUR LORD'S HEALING TOUCH.

S. LUKE vi. 19.

“The whole multitude sought to touch Him, for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all.”

NOT once nor twice, but continually, in the history of our blessed Lord's doings on earth, we find this picture, so to call it, drawn for us by the finger of God. We see Jesus Christ, wherever He goes, pouring around Him the most precious gifts of life, and health, and soundness of body and mind. Wheresoever He shows Himself, “in villages, or cities, or country, they bring the sick upon beds and couches, and beseech Him that they may touch if it were but the hem of His garment: and as many as touch Him are made perfectly whole.” They bring unto Him “all that are sick with divers diseases and torments, them that are possessed with devils, and them that are lunatic, and them that have the palsy;” and He heals them all.

We seem with our mind's eye to behold this wonderful sight: the blessed Jesus in the midst, and the distressed and anxious sufferers crowding around Him on every side, waiting with more or less of patience, each till his own turn come to receive the healing

gift, and, after it, going away in thankfulness, or in still more devout thankfulness continuing to wait on Him Who gave it.

We can form some idea of this; for we know how eager we ourselves should be, whether in our own sickness or in our friend's, to seek such miraculous benefit if it came in our way. Should we not put every thing by for a good chance of so great a blessing? Should we mind distant journeys or long waiting? How would our hearts beat with joyful hope, when, amidst many hundreds of cures, all at the same time requiring to be attended to by the Divine Healer, we found at last that our own turn or our friend's was come! How reverently should we cast ourselves down before Him! How attentively regard His countenance, and watch for His words of hope and consolation! How assuredly should we feel in our hearts, and acknowledge in all our behaviour, that "there is no other God that can save after this sort," "no other name under Heaven whereby we may receive health and salvation, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Such a work as this was going on, such an assembly was gathered round our Saviour, when the messengers of S. John Baptist came to Him with the question which you read in the Gospel for this day: "Art Thou He that should come," the Saviour, the Anointed One, foretold in the Prophets, "or look we for another?"

S. John sent to ask this, not so much, we may believe, from any doubt of his own, as in order to fix the faith of the disciples whom he sent. He could have told them much about our Saviour; for he had

baptized Him with his own hands; had seen the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him; had heard the voice, "This is My beloved Son;" had pointed out Christ to several of his followers as "the Lamb of God which should take away the sins of the world."

S. John might have said much of all these wonderful things; but he chose rather—the Holy Spirit guided him—to send his doubting disciples to the Fountain Head of all truth and wisdom. To see Christ, and still more to feel Him, to see and feel Him as their Healer and Saviour, was, S. John well knew, the very thing to cure their trouble and perplexity.

They came and asked the question of Christ; and He, instead of directly answering, wrought a great number of His miracles in their sight, and told them, "Go, shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear;" some also of "the dead are raised up." This was what He bade them take notice of: by this, without any words of His, He would have them understand that He was indeed the Christ. Those who knew their Bibles would remember what the Prophet had said, "^a The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. The lame man shall leap as a hart; and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." They would be quite sure that this is the Christ, the Prophet that should come into the world.

And as those who had any disease or torment would press near to Him, and not let Him go till

^a Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.

they had obtained their cure of Him, so those who were anxious about their souls would come to Him yet more eagerly, confessing their sins, and seeking to repent and be forgiven; for this was what God would especially have them understand. When they saw what blessed effects followed on coming to our Lord for the healing of their bodies, they were to think of their immortal, but fallen, souls; how much more they wanted healing, and how surely this must be He, in Whom the very power of the Lord was present to heal them!

And such should be the mind and the faith of us all, my brethren, both in respect of our own and our friends' bodily and earthly infirmities, and in respect of our Lord's miracles, when we read of them. We do well to consider these outward pains and calamities as so many tokens and types of inward and spiritual evils; and Christ curing them by His touch gives us His own sure token of His will and power to cure all the diseases of our souls.

Blindness, for example,—we perceive at once what evil condition of the heart *that* represents. “^b Every one that doeth evil hateth the light,” and shutteth his eyes against it, until at last he loses even the power of seeing. The longer he goes on in his own bad way, so much the darker does he become inwardly; so much the less able to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil. He stumbles accordingly, that is, he steps amiss and sins at every thing that comes in his way. It is but a sort of chance if ever he is right; for the most part every step takes him further into danger.

^b S. John iii. 20.

Such was the condition, outwardly, of that blind man who sat and begged at the Temple gate, when Jesus passed by, and made clay of the spittle and anointed his eyes with the clay and bade him wash in the pool of Siloam : and he went and washed, and came seeing. In like manner, when heathens, blind and ignorant persons, are wandering on in the darkness of this world, our Blessed Redeemer applies Himself to their souls by ways, which seem to the unbelieving, mean and ordinary, as He made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay : and He sends them to the pool of Siloam, the Laver of regeneration in Baptism, and they receive inward sight, grace to see and to choose their duty.

Again : suppose a person stricken with palsy, unable to move his limbs at his will, trying to stir in one direction, and finding that he is borne the other way in spite of himself ; cold too, and unsteady, and unapt for his ordinary works. What is this but a figure and token of an unhappy sinner to whom sin is grown habitual ? who is ready to cry out with him whom S. Paul describes, “^cThe good that I would, I do not ; and the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me : I delight in the law of God after the inward man ; but I find another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” “I,” the very same person who “with my mind serve the law of God, serve with my flesh the law of sin.” “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?”

^c Rom. vii. 19.

This is the misery, this the complaint, of our poor fallen nature left to itself, as having either not received God's grace, or (still worse) received, and well nigh thrown it away. This, I say, is the very palsy of the soul. What is the remedy?

In the case of one poor paralytic, we know, his friends, having faith, brought him to Jesus; and Jesus, seeing their faith, said first, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," and afterwards, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."

In another case, the man lying helpless on the edge of the pool of Bethesda, which should have healed him, our Lord of His own gracious will came where he was, and said, as before, "Take up thy bed, and walk."

So the sad helplessness, the inward palsy, of habitual and even deadly sin, is to be cured in one way, and in one way only. The man must be brought to Jesus Christ by the charitable prayers and help of kind friends, or Christ of His own mercy must come in His power where the man lies; and, he not hindering the gracious work by unbelief, the Lord will say to him; "Thy sins be forgiven thee; take up thy bed and walk," He will justify the sinner by His grace, begun in baptism or renewed in penitence; and the sinner forgiven will do the works of one in spiritual health.

Again, they brought to Christ men possessed with devils, given over for a time, their very bodies, to the power of evil spirits, to be tormented, sometimes with dumbness and deafness, sometimes with all manner of violent and wild fits, such as those sometimes experience who are utterly out of their senses.

Now plainly this way of dealing with our outward bodies shows how he will treat our invisible souls, if

we will let him. He will make them dumb and deaf towards God, sullen and reckless, unwilling to hear His commands, or to join His saints in praising Him. Or else the Devil will make our souls wild and ungovernable in pursuit of some wretched earthly object, not caring how we tear ourselves in pieces, or what steep places we rush violently down. None can cast him out, but our Lord only. He alone can say with authority and power, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit!" or "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him."

We see and feel such things now and then, when the grace of Christ gets the better of some violent or sullen passion, which was carrying away the whole man, and hurrying him down to destruction both of soul and body. The same Christ, Who cast out devils with a word in the times of the Gospel, is still ready in His Church to cast out these otherwise incurable devils, if we will seek Him, as He bade, with prayer and fasting.

Again, imagine the case of leprosy. Think you see a poor unhappy creature, worn down by the most loathsome of diseases, all wounds and bruises and putrifying sores, and knowing himself to be abhorred and kept at a distance by all men, and shut out from the very worship of Almighty God: think you see such an one, not drawing near to our Saviour, for he durst not, but casting himself down at a great distance, and crying out, "Jesus Master, have mercy on us:" or if, moved by Christ's compassionate ways, he had ventured nearer, yet still he scarce dares ask the favour he longs for, but kneels down, falls down

at His feet, worships Him, beseeches Him with the lowest humility, "Lord, if thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," even me, the most unworthy and abject of all.

Think you see and hear all this, and think, on the other hand, that you see the blessed Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand and touch him, saying, "I will, be thou clean:" and immediately the leprosy is departed from him, and his flesh is restored as the flesh of a little child, and he is free to shew himself to the priests, and to offer unto God again prayers and thanksgivings in His holy temple. What is it all an image of, but the free almighty grace of the most Holy Jesus, coming by His Sacraments to the impure unclean heart, and making it surely, though commonly by slow degrees, pure and holy again, that it may see God?

I will mention but one more miracle, and that, the last and greatest of all. "The dead," says our Lord in to-day's Gospel, "are raised up." "^a And you," says S. Paul to those who had been heathens and were Christians, "you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And the Church in the Catechism teaches us, that the gift of God in holy Baptism is "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness." Every day this great work, raising the dead, is wrought even now among us, as often as souls born in sin are brought here to be made partakers of Christ. He Who at first breathed a living soul into Adam, did at our Christening breathe into us His Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. And in whatever measure we have since fallen away

^a Eph. ii. 1.

from Him by any kind of sin, and impaired that holy and divine life, in that measure we beseech Him, then especially when we bury our dead, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness. Effectual repentance after great and serious sin is a sort of resurrection, a miracle of grace. It brings, as it were, life from the dead. Of such blessed repentance, as well as of regeneration in Baptism, Christ's raising the dead here on earth was the token and shadow.

As, then, oppressed and diseased persons in those days might know that our Lord was really come, by the healing which He bestowed on the bodies of the afflicted, so are we now to assure ourselves more and more, that He is our only Saviour, our only way to happiness, by the help and comfort which He is sure to give us, if we draw nearer to Him continually in the keeping of His commandments. As faith was the condition of healing then, so is it the condition of grace now. Come to our Saviour with that faith, which will make you believe Him really present, and He *will* be present to heal your souls, as He was to heal their bodies. Come with a sincere desire to get rid of your sins, and He will surely help you to get rid of them.

Another thing to be observed is, the manner in which, for the most part, the blessed Jesus wrought these miracles. It was commonly not without touch of His sacred Body. "° As many as *touched* Him were made perfectly whole." "The whole multitude sought to *touch* Him, for there went virtue out of Him and healed them all." They thought themselves happy to

° S. Matt. xiv. 36.

reach but to the hem of His garment. And the same gift was continued, according to His promise, in His Church. The shadow of S. Peter, the handkerchief and aprons from the body of S. Paul, had power to cure diseases and drive away bad spirits.

This touch of Christ to heal men's bodies is the figure and token of His spiritual touch in His Sacraments to heal our souls. He touches us, when we are baptized, taking us up in His arms and blessing us, and making us very members of Himself, bone of His Bone and flesh of His Flesh. He touches us, by the hand of His servants the Bishops, when we are confirmed. He touches us still more nearly, more awefully, more inwardly, when we worthily receive the Holy Communion. For then we really and "spiritually eat the Flesh of Christ and drink His Blood: we dwell in Christ and Christ in us: we are one with Christ and Christ with us." Thus He touches us all over, within and without, as a perfect living medicine, entering into our whole souls and bodies, and turning every part of them into the likeness of Himself.

As the presence and ministry of the Apostles were a great token of this healing touch of our Saviour in the first Church at Jersusalem, so is the presence and ministry of those whom we call Clergymen, ordained by laying-on the Apostles' hands, the token of its continuance here amongst ourselves. This is why we think so much of it, and why, as at these Ember times especially, we are taught to remember it so earnestly with prayer and fasting. It is the token of Christ's healing touch.

We never can thank God enough for it; but let us

remember at the same time, how dreadful it will be at the last Day, should we be found either to have scorned these Sacraments, or to have behaved ourselves unworthily of them. Jesus Christ is our Physician; and the physician is with reason displeased when the sick man, out of frowardness, either refuses his medicine, or goes on in other respects so as to destroy its good effect. No cure can be looked for in such a case; neither can any salvation be looked for by those, who seek not the touch of Christ in His own ordained ways; nor by those again, (still more shocking) who touch Him only to defile themselves anew with sin.

SERMON XIX.

GOD'S LONGSUFFERING A CALL TO REPENTANCE. I.
HIS LONGSUFFERING WITH THE WORLD,
AND THE CHURCH.

2 S. PET. iii. 15.

*“Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is
salvation.”*

THESE words are part of an Advent warning, which the great Apostle S. Peter is giving to them that have obtained like precious faith with him, i. e. to all Christians; and to us among the rest. I call it an Advent warning, because it comes just after a very solemn mention of the Day of Judgement; “The Day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night, wherein the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat: the earth also and all the works therein shall be burned up.” Who that hears of such fearful things, and really believes what he hears, would not try to be prepared for them, if any way was given him? Therefore the Apostle goes on, as is natural, and says, “ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things before, give diligence to be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” Take

all the care you can, that when He comes in so awful a way, He may come to you in love, and not in anger; as a friend, and not as an enemy; as a reconciled Father, and not as an offended King. And in order to this, endeavour to be without spot. You know you cannot make yourself so, yet endeavour to be so, and trust Him to find a way of working in you that great miracle, which He hath promised to work in them that love Him; viz. that, unclean as they are in themselves and unable to endure His espial, yet He may find them, when He comes at last, thoroughly purged, without spot, and blameless. This good and most merciful advice the Apostle follows up with the mention of God's longsuffering. "Account," he says, "that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation."

Now you know, in a general way, what longsuffering means. It means, when any person has been ill-used, and might justly enough do something to punish the offender, and yet he puts off doing so. In this sense longsuffering is sometimes used, in speaking of our dealings with one another; as when it is said, "^aCharity suffereth long, and is kind;" and when S. Paul bids Christians, as the elect of God, to "^bput on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." That is, he bids us bear long with those who behave ill to us, to be slow to anger, and glad to find excuses for sparing them. That is longsuffering between one man and another. And by this you may understand easily what the longsuffering of the Lord is, which He shews daily towards us all. It is, His waiting before He strikes,

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

^b Col. iii. 12.

His not punishing sin immediately, as it deserves to be punished, but correcting us in a measure, and leaving time to repent and amend.

You see at once, how this may be our salvation. It will be so, if we make good use of the time so graciously allowed us, and spend it in true penitence, quite differently from what has gone before, trying to please, not ourselves but Him. Then Christ's longsuffering will prove to us salvation; but not if we take it in the wrong way. How may it be taken in the wrong way? If people are led by the Evil one to do as those scoffers did, of whom S. Peter had spoken a little before the text: of whom he says, There would be some in the last time, who would walk after their own ungodly lusts, and when they should be told of the Last Day, would say, "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were." Because God bears with us, because He does not even now bring on the end and burn up the world for its sins, therefore too many unhappy sinners harden themselves in their pernicious ways; their love of sin makes them unbelievers, and the unbelief hardens them in their sin. Be not ye like unto them, but account, as the truth is, that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; i. e. when you see, as you cannot help seeing and feeling, how long He bears with sinners, and when the devil would put it into your hearts to imagine, that of course He cannot be so very angry with sin; do you turn away with abhorrence from that wicked thought, and judge rather that His purpose in so bearing with you is to bring you to repentance, and so to salvation. It is no sign that

He cares little for your sins, but it is a very great sign that He cares very greatly for you in love, and longs earnestly to save you from your sins. It is as if a master whose servant has behaved ill, should nevertheless not turn him off all at once, but keep him so many weeks or months longer, to see if he would go on more dutifully. We all know that there are two ways of behaving in such cases : some servants, touched by their master's forbearance, and humbled in heart by the thought how unworthily they have treated him, really endeavour to amend what has been amiss ; others, selfish, reckless, hard-hearted, say to themselves, "My master seems very good-natured ; he has spared me this time ; I dare say he will spare me again ; I do not see that I have any call to put myself out of the way for him this time ;" and so they go on taking liberties as before ; and the end is, that sooner or later they lose their place.

So it is between God and us : we neglect our tasks, we do harm instead of good in God's family, and He warns us that sooner or later He will have to say, Depart from Me. Some are alarmed at this, and repent : others, (too many alas !) presume upon His great mercy, and commit more and more sin, trusting that as He has borne with them hitherto, so He will continue to bear with them, and they shall be safe at last ; though, if you asked them, they could not at all tell how. The one sort account that the longsuffering of God is salvation, i. e. that He bears with them in order to save them from their sins ; and they are afraid and ashamed to trifle with so great mercy. The other sort account Him slack concerning His promise, i. e. they fancy that He

does not mean what He says; they say, "There has always been sin, and we do not see that it has always brought punishment, and we will take our chance as others do." Alas! how common is this way of going on! and yet how horribly profane and ungrateful! As if a beloved and favoured son, having been many times forgiven, should say in his heart, "As my father is so kind, I will just go on in the ways which he has forbidden." To such, the other Apostle, S. Paul, gives earnest warning in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: a verse, of which S. Peter seems to have been thinking, when he wrote the words in our text. The place in Romans is as follows: "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Of these words, I say, S. Peter was very likely thinking, when he bade us all "account the longsuffering of our Lord to be salvation," "even" (he adds) "as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you." Now if you looked through S. Paul's writings, you would nowhere find the very words quoted by S. Peter, "The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation:" but you do find those other words, which I have just now mentioned to you, "The goodness of God leadeth to repentance:" the meaning whereof is just the same.

But whether or no S. Peter was speaking of what he had read in the Epistle to the Romans, or only of the general tenour of S. Paul's writings, evident it is, that both S. Peter and S. Paul, speaking alike by

the Holy Ghost, teach us earnestly the great Advent lesson, not to abuse the patience and longsuffering of God, but so to think of it, and so use it, as God's appointed way of bringing us to repentance and salvation. Indeed, my brethren, there is no excuse for us, if we deal otherwise with His great mercy. The very time and season of the year—the time of winter, the time of Advent, teaches us how longsuffering God is; He has spared us now once more through all the four seasons of the year. Others have died and been buried around us: we have heard the Church bell go for the departure of many a friend and neighbour, and we are still here. Again we see the leaves fallen from the trees, the sun low, the darkness long; but as yet our leaves abide, our sun is not set, the long darkness of the grave has not come upon us. Why, but because God is longsuffering? He had borne with us so many years before, and now it has pleased Him to bear with us one year longer.

We are come to Advent again. The holy season, the time of preparation and penitence, has come upon us, before we have been taken into those regions, where preparation and penitence cannot be; it will be for the careless ones, only remorse and regret; and these will come too late. Advent has come upon us once again, whilst we are yet on our trial. We have been permitted to wake up this morning in this world, and not in Eternity. We are not as yet where it will be too late to pray. God has allowed us once more to hear the voice of His Church, warning us of the Great Day of wrath, before it is actually come upon us. The horror, the confusion, the des-

pair of the Resurrection Day, such as it will appear to the wicked, has not yet surprised us. Our night has not come; it is yet day; we are still enabled to work the work of Him that sent us, if we will. Whose doing is it, that things are as yet so well with us? As for ourselves, we know very well that we are not able to keep ourselves in being, a single hour, nor to raise ourselves out of sleep. Which of us can say, that he has lived so as truly to deserve any such favour of God? No. It is all His patience and long-suffering: and while it shames and humbles us to think that we should hitherto have walked so unworthy of it, yet well may it encourage and hearten us to make much of the time to come, be it long or short, for which He has so graciously spared us.

Let us consider this longsuffering, as the time of Advent invites us, a little more particularly.

God Almighty bears long, as with the wicked world in general, so with each of us sinners in particular; and in both, His purpose is, to bring on timely repentance and amendment. For the present I will speak but a few words of His bearing long with this whole sinful world, and with His fallen and corrupt Church; intending at some future time, to say something of His no less wonderful mercy in waiting, as He has done, for the repentance of each single sinner among us.

Consider then, my brethren; it is now, we suppose, more than 5800 years since the world fell into sin; the world which God made for His own glory, so good and pure, that His own all-searching Eye could behold nothing amiss in it. He beheld all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. Adam fell

into sin, and by his wilfulness the whole race of man became fallen and corrupt; it was all loathsome and abominable in the eyes of Him Who made it: every day, and each hour and moment of the day, in all regions and corners of the earth, so many sins have been committed, so many wilful and inexcusable transgressions in thought, word, and deed, of His most holy and strict law, immediately under His Eye. He was looking on each one; was intimately present in all the darkest corners of it all: nay, not one of all those crimes could have been committed, but by abuse of the gifts and faculties, with which, even at that moment, He was supplying us for our good. Cain could not have slain Abel, but by the strength which God had given him, to lift up his arm and aim the blow. Judas could not have betrayed our Saviour, had not God continued unto him the power of speech, whereby he was enabled to tell the chief Priests where they might find our Lord and take Him in the night. And it is just the same with all the crimes which are daily wrought; with those which ourselves may have committed. In every one of them, we were abusing God's gifts to His face. And all this, as I said, has been going on ever since the first sin was committed; and day by day, alas! there is more and more of it, as the world gets more and more full of inhabitants, the Kingdom of God not growing in proportion. And yet He bears with it; He has not cast us away.

Consider again the other and, if possible, greater miracle of enduring mercy. It is now near 1850 years, since the most High God Himself, God the Son, took to Himself our nature, and became Man, to redeem and save this fallen, unworthy world of

many

ours. And having sacrificed Himself for us, and risen again from the dead to give us new life, He went up into Heaven with our human nature, exalting it even to the Right Hand of the Father: there He pleads for us night and day, and from thence He sent, and evermore sends His own Co-equal, Co-eternal Spirit, to regenerate us one by one, to unite us to Himself, to dwell in our hearts and bodies, and make us partakers of the Divine Nature, truly good, and truly fit for Heaven. All this, as I said, Jesus Christ did for His Church 1850 years ago, and has been continually repeating it all, in virtue and effect, to each person, whom by His Sacraments He has made and continued a member of that Church. What a world of mercy and goodness is here! and what a world of sin, obstinate sin, in men's hearts, to slight and abuse it, as we see and know they do! What a world again of patience forbearance and long-suffering in Him, Who bears so long with all this sad ingratitude, and still continues to us not only the rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and all the blessings which we call gifts of nature, but also the high and precious treasures of His Church! He hath not withdrawn His spiritual Presence; the Holy Comforter hath not returned into Heaven, leaving the world forlorn and desolate, as it was before the Day of Pentecost. He hath not commanded the clouds, the fountains of His Sacramental grace, to rain no rain, to shower down no blessings upon us. Every day those Sacraments are profaned and defiled: Baptism renounced by deadly sin and unbelief; the Body and Blood of Christ wronged and insulted by unworthy receiving; yet His Holy Spirit is here to bless and sanctify the souls

and bodies of the children who are offered to Him; and the Lord Jesus is verily and indeed present to feed us, if we will, with the Bread of Life. Our Churches are full of irreverence, yet Christ abides in them: our Bibles are slighted and disobeyed, yet He takes them not away: our Bishops and Priests are little regarded, yet He continues the holy succession to us. Other places and other countries, of whom we have no reason to think that they sinned more deeply than we, have been utterly bereft of God's outward and visible Church; they were once all Christian, and now there is hardly a Christian among them: but to us He still permits the presence of His Holy Catholic Church; He waits, and waits, and the world waxes very old, and angels perhaps are wondering in Heaven how He should bear so long with impenitent sinners; and the souls of the martyrs and other faithful departed cry out unto Him, "Lord, how long?" And still He waits, and stays as it were the hand of His Archangel, and will not let him blow the last trumpet, nor kindle the fires which shall burn up the whole world. He waits, He withdraws His Hand, that we may repent. And we—what are we doing? While He is bearing so long with us, is there really a single thing, in which we are used to deny ourselves for His sake? How long is it, since He has warned us by His Spirit that we are in such and such an evil way, and we are still going on, as badly or worse than ever? And what will be the end of it all? Alas! we know too well, many of us, what it must be, without a great change on our part. If there be any wrong way, in which we are going on, and will not amend it, we know

that after a few more preparatory Advents, the real Coming, the last Advent, will dawn upon us, and the time of God's longsuffering will be gone for ever. But what a day of joy will that be, to those who have allowed their hearts to be touched by His goodness ! to those for whom He shall not have waited in vain ! Think it well over, my brethren, and choose the better part, while yet there is time.

SERMON XX.

THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD A CALL TO REPENTANCE. II.

HIS LONGSUFFERING TOWARDS ALL SOULS OF MEN.

2 S. PET. iii. 15.

*“Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is
salvation.”*

IN considering these words, we have seen that the patience and longsuffering of God is shewn, partly towards this whole wicked world, in bearing with it so long and not yet causing the great Day of Judgment to begin, and partly, and still more wonderfully, towards His fallen and decayed Church, in continuing to her the means of grace and not casting her off, although there is so much wickedness within her. Partly again, this same longsuffering is shewn towards each one of us; and this is what we have now to consider more particularly. And it is so far easier to consider, in that it is what every one of us may certainly discern and judge of, more or less. There is no need to have gone much about in the world, nor to have read or heard a great deal of history. We may all find out and feel for ourselves, how patient and gentle and fatherly He is, with Whom we have to do, by only remembering ever so little what the

course of our lives has been, and what it would have been, had we carefully kept His commandments.

Think first, my brethren, simply of the time, during which we have been on our trial in this world: on trial, like servants or apprentices, in the house and family of Jesus Christ. Which of us has really done his best to find out His will and please Him? And yet He has borne with us even to this moment. Here we still are; He has not yet cast us out, nor shut the door upon us; we are not yet in the outer darkness. Turn your mind to the great periods, the turning points of your life. How long is it, since you were baptized, since you were first hired to be Christ's servant? Then, you know, He gave you His grace to make you a member of Him: and you promised to give yourself up to Him, to turn yourself towards Him, as the first and principal thing, all the days of your life. Have you as yet done so? Have you ever in deed and in truth renewed your baptismal vow and consented to it with all your heart? If you have been confirmed, you did so in words; but how far were you in earnest? And even if then, or at other times, you have really had good purposes and intentions to serve God wholly and for ever, still the great question remains; How far have you kept those purposes? How far have you swerved from them by inexcusable carelessness, or by wilful and obstinate sin? And yet He has borne with us all this time: to some of us He has allowed fifty, sixty, seventy years, to repent and amend in. O how longsuffering has He been to us, and how deeply must our own hearts condemn us, if we, unhappily trusting, as we say, to this mercy of His, yet go on

in any known sin, or neglect of duty, like spoilt and undutiful children! Who will pity or help us, in heaven or in earth, when the time comes, (as come it must before long,) that even His fatherly longsuffering will not be able to endure us any more?

Next, let each one of us try to remember how long it is since he learnt the Lord's Prayer: i. e. since Christ Himself taught him to pray; for it is Christ's teaching, though it comes through our parents and elders. I suppose we all learnt it when we were little children: so many years then, we have known how to pray; so many mornings, and so many evenings, we have so far been at no loss, how we might speak to our Father, to obtain His blessing. If we said no prayer at all, it was not for want of knowing what words to pray in. If we said the good words without thought, our hearts all the while far from Him, it was not that we did not know we ought to be thinking of God. He has seen and watched us all along; He knows, how many times we have missed saying His prayer, how many times we have said it with hearts willingly absent from Him; how many times, having said it, we rose up and went back to our sins. And yet He has been with us; He has not yet taken the use of His Prayer from us; He has neither tied our tongues, nor taken away our memory, nor our senses. Here we are yet, and here are our Prayer Books, and here is God's Church to kneel in, and His people knowing His prayer, as we do, by heart, and ready when the time comes, to say it with us: we are not yet among the lost spirits, who cannot pray, who have forgotten all their good words. Surely He Who taught us that Prayer, is the most

patient of all teachers ; and we, if we will not mend our way of saying it, are the most incorrigible of bad and undutiful scholars.

Perhaps some of us may be able to remember the time when they were first led to Church ; at least, when the holy place and its services began to lay hold of their young minds, and to make some sort of serious impression upon them : as I believe, there are few children, who have not sometimes had such feelings, if they were at all brought to Church in their young days. Recollect then, as well as you can, how long is it since, as a child, God gave you those feelings ; and what is now become of them ? You have been so many times to Church ; have you yet learned how to behave ? The Church is the same place as it was then : the Lord Jesus is still here amid the two or three gathered together in His Name : God Almighty still permits you your health and the use of your limbs to come here. Is it not really a wonder, when we come to think of it, that it should be so well with us ? If we had our due, we know well, many of us, that we should not be suffered in this holy place : the most we could hope for would be to stand or kneel in the porch without, weeping and confessing our sins, and humbly asking the prayers of the faithful. Ought we not to be there in heart, owning with all sincerity, that the worst place here is too good for us ? Let us be afraid, lest, if we think tolerably well of ourselves and account that no special repentance is necessary to us, because we are still willing and are permitted to come here as part of God's people, we be found at last to have been abusing the riches of His patience.

The next matter to be inquired of, is one, which all who are of age, can answer. It is not a matter which any one can well have forgotten. If you have been confirmed, have you come to the Holy Communion? You surely knew that your Lord expected it of you: you knew by the Catechism that it is necessary for the salvation of us all: you knew that our Lord said, "Do this in remembrance of Me:" you knew that you had promised to keep all His holy Will and Commandments. Have you then come? and if you have, how long was it before you came? and how far have you kept up that holy and blessed duty? And again, and most especially, what care have you taken, when you came, to come worthily? Have you thoroughly examined yourself, and really left off your crying sins, at least in full purpose of heart, before you ventured to receive the Lord's Body? If not, see here again another world of extreme long-suffering and infinite patience, on the part of your Maker and Judge. You have all this while slighted His parting token; the one thing which, when He was about to die, He bade you do in remembrance of Him, you have either slighted or profaned it; and yet He sweetly and lovingly invites you still; He sends His messengers to say to you continually, "All things are ready, come unto the marriage." He has yet patience with you, and you, will you go on, yet trying His patience more and more? Take care; for surely there will be an end. Some one or other of these many invitations will be the last: and if we have unthankfully refused that last, where shall we be?

Only just count, every one of you, how many Ad-

vents, how many Christmasses this season will make in your lives, if you are spared to see the end of it. Every one of those Advents and Christmasses was a new instance of God's longsuffering.' Through each Advent He has spared us, that He might give us a chance of repenting and preparing ourselves to receive His Son, offering to be born anew in us, spiritually born in our hearts, at the following Christmas. The Advents and the Christmasses have both passed away: and we—where have we been found at the end of each holy and happy season? how many steps nearer Heaven? For truly might it be said of many of us, that God has waited so long for us, and we have taken no notice of Him. Shall it be so always? If we permit it to be so, this Advent, this Christmas, most likely it *will* be so always. And then how forlorn how utterly wretched will it be, to look back on those holy seasons, to count our Christmasses and Advents, and know that each one of them is set down against us for ever in the Book of God, because we have profanely turned them to far other purposes than God intended.

How deeply shall we then regret our long and continued childishness, in that we depended on having more time, merely because we had had so much: like the unbeliever in the Psalms, who says in his heart, "Tush, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen unto me^a:" or like the revellers in Isaiah; "Come ye, say they, and I will fetch wine and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant^b." "To-morrow shall be as this day"—it is a

^a Ps. x. 6.^b Isa. lvi. 12.

very natural feeling, yet surely a most unreasonable one. Too naturally do our frail and fallen hearts turn away from the thought of parting with the pleasant trifles which happen to engage us for the time. Because we have been spared, we take it for granted that we shall be spared again, and we allow ourselves to form plans and projects, not considering the uncertainty of life. The remedy is, never to forget that uncertainty. It is a severe and unpleasant remedy, especially to young and sanguine hearts, but it is the true and proper remedy, the cure prescribed by the Great Physician Himself. For thus He speaks by His Apostle S. James, “Go to now, ye that say, To-day and to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.” The Holy Spirit hereby gives us to understand, that we ought always to keep our uncertain condition in mind; we must take pains to do so, for the feeling will not come of itself: we must pray to remember at all times, that in the midst of life we are in death, and then the warnings of the Advent season will not be lost upon us as they have been.

Remember too, that if time alone deadens the feeling of the uncertainty of life and health, much more does sin indulged and sinful indifference: let a man go on for a certain number of years in known covetousness or lust, ever seeking money, or full of unclean desire, and it will seem as if his very sense of his mortal condition passed away; in regard of

death and Eternity such an one will often grow quite stupified, as if he could not at all comprehend how any such thing could befall him. It is a sad case; and those who wait on souls too often meet with it. How greatly then ought we to fear both lust and covetousness, and all other sinful habits, since, besides all their other mischiefs, they are apt to make the heart even incapable of hearkening to the heavenly Voice. What signifies Advent or Christmas, to the poor wretch who has given himself up to these unworthy desires? Nay, what signify to him the very pains of death, and the terrors of Judgement? His heart is hardened, he can feel nothing of it, it seems as if nothing but hell-fire itself could awaken him. O Lord, deliver us not over to this most fearful condition, and may we all thoroughly understand that one more Advent and Christmas, spent in careless or wicked ways, will bring us sadly near to it.

Perhaps you see other people, older than yourselves, taking sinful unchristian liberties: and it comes into your mind, "If it can be any how safe for them, it will be safer for me, who am so much younger than they are." And sometimes by God's exceeding mercy, they repent in their old age, and turn over a new leaf, and so behave themselves that we may have some hope of their being pardoned: and this also the Evil one turns into a snare for the younger, and they whisper to their own hearts, "I may indulge myself yet a while, I need not make such haste to be good; see how well such an one goes on, yet he did not take to devotional and penitent ways until he was older than I am. It will be quite enough for me if I can be like him: I do not wish to set up to be better

than he was." To all such ways of talking one may reply at once, "You know not what you are speaking of: you know not what will come hereafter of the liberties which people now take, quite with impunity as it seems to us; neither can you read the heart of any one whose example you say you would be content to follow. How do you know it would be enough for you to be like him? You cannot tell what difficulties he had to contend with: a little from him may be more in God's sight, than a great deal from you who have so many advantages. One thing you may be sure of, that, if he is such as you may safely take pattern from, he is even now bitterly regretting the waste of his precious early years. While you are encouraging yourself in the like by his example, he would give the world to be rid of it."

Lastly, there is sometimes a contrary feeling to the former, to which middle aged and elderly persons are especially liable, as if it were *too late* for *them* to do any good; *their* hour, they are led to imagine, is passed away and gone; they cannot make so great a change at *their* time of life; and so they turn all their thoughts again downward, and will be satisfied to lose this Advent as they did the last; yet God speaks plainly, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" And His Angel declares, "with God all things are possible." True, the effort required is greater; you are sunk, as it were, lower down in the sides of the pit: still you may make a spring, and recover yourself out of it, if you will, by the aid of the arm which is even now stretched out to help you: for that arm, remember, is Almighty. Therefore give no way to slothful, desponding thoughts, but let this Advent see

your courageous endeavours, and there is all reason to hope that by God's mercy it may see your effectual deliverance.

And let us all pray to have *real* trust in our good and merciful God : to be quite sure that His will is to save us, yet not otherwise than by our full and sincere repentance ; that His longsuffering may be to us salvation, and not greater damnation.

SERMON XXI.

THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD A CALL TO
REPENTANCE. III.

HIS LONGSUFFERING IN HIS DEALINGS WITH
EACH SOUL.

2 S. PET. iii. 15.

*“Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is
salvation.”*

I took notice, last Sunday, of that longsuffering of Almighty God, which may be called common to us all, whereby we have been spared to see so many Advents, so many returns of Christmas Day. This is, as I said, a consideration common to every one alike: except so far as increasing years make the call more earnest, and us, if possible, more inexcusable for slighting it:—an old man, we all feel, being more hardened than a young one who should go on in the same sin under the same circumstances.

But now let us go on to think on some of the special and personal warnings, which all from time to time receive, though not always distinctly aware of them in their own persons. I am sure, if we would notice and remember things, we should soon find that not one of us has gone on without a great many tokens of this kind from our Father; some have had

more, some fewer ; but all enough to assure them of His merciful care.

To speak first of the most obvious kind of tokens, the events of God's Providence, making a great difference to us outwardly, in our bodies, or in our properties. I say that every one of these, whether it were for good or evil, for joy or for sorrow, was a warning, and so intended by God's Providence. Serious illness, for example, is a great and direct warning. We all know it, we are all ready to own it. When the body is bowed down with weakness and the limbs torn with agony, it is as if the great Judge came to us one by one, as He came to us all in the persons of our first parents, and said, "^aDust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return ;" or as He came to Hezekiah and said, "^bSet thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." *That* is a kind of warning which all acknowledge, except they are lost in utter unbelief. But surely it is true, and well were it for us if we would consider, that lesser illnesses also and pains of body are in their way real tokens from the Almighty. All pain is in itself a token of the great everlasting pain, the punishment of hell-fire : and if you do but lie awake one night with tooth-ache or rheumatism, it is a notice from God, how entirely you are in His Hands, how surely His judgements can and will find you out, if you die in His displeasure. Therefore I say that even lesser pains, and such as are in no sense deadly, may well be regarded as tokens and warnings, especially if they are of long continuance. They are clear instances of His longsuffering, Who is most unwilling

^a Gen. iii. 19.

^b 2 Kgs. xx. 1.

that we should go to sleep in our sins, or die before we have thoroughly repented of them.

And not only the troubles which actually come upon men, but those also which seriously threaten them, and come very near them—what are called “hair’s breadth escapes”—are very distinct calls from the Almighty, great instances of His longsuffering—greater in one sense even than what we have before mentioned—for how rich is that mercy which will not afflict or grieve, even in this world, if it be not absolutely necessary to secure our good in the Eternal world. Consider then now in this season of Advent, how many narrow escapes you have had, since you can remember, from near and great calamities. I suppose that there are few of us who grew up to man’s estate without something of this kind happening. How many, when they are children, go too near the fire, how many have bad falls, how many hurt themselves and one another in various ways: and sometimes we hear of their wandering from their parents, and being lost for a time, and found providentially! Now every thing of that kind, when the child comes to know and be told of it, is a token of God’s longsuffering to that child; and so much more are the escapes which befall it when it has grown older, and begun to commit actual sin.

Then we are to take into account, not only our own visitations and narrow escapes, but also all those which happen to others within our knowledge, particularly our own near kindred, our friends and neighbours. And how many such are there! how many sudden deaths, how many grievous accidents, fires, loss of limbs, rapid and contagious sicknesses,

disorder and decay of mind, losses also and failures in business and in property, coming suddenly on, and sometimes ruining men's estates, sometimes passing away when there seemed to be no avoiding them ! All these changes and many more we are continually hearing of as befalling some one or another ; and whatever they are to that other, to us surely they are warnings from God Almighty—tokens of His longsuffering and kindness ; for why does He spare us, but that we may think better of things, and repent without being ourselves stricken ? And why does He cause us to know what falls upon others, or comes very near them, but that we may consider in good time, how frail and uncertain our own condition is ?

Now let us pass on from these outward and visible accidents, to another sort of warnings, which come more directly home to the consciences of each one of us. Many of us, I should think, are able to remember sayings and admonitions of friends or parents, addressed to us when we were children or quite young people ;—how they managed us ; how they kept us in order ; saying words to us and doing things which we could not well understand at the time, and therefore too often we slighted them : but now we have come to know what their words of caution and acts of discipline meant ; we know, it may be, by sad experience ; and so the warnings, which we slighted then, may now by God's mercy be doing us much good ; helping us to be truly penitent and ashamed of our sins ; as S. John tells us in more than one place concerning our Lord's own warnings. These things understood not His disciples at the first, but when

Jesus was glorified, then they remembered and understood them. So may we, if we will, remember and understand what our fathers and mothers said to us long ago. It was in fact God's warning through them; and it is by God's longsuffering that we are now alive to remember it; may it not be lost upon us! may we, like S. Peter, be truly penitent when the Almighty sends a sign to remind us of all that we have heard and neglected; what faults our carelessness has led us into, and how bitterly we ought to weep for them.

And not only in those early warnings, but all our lives long, we have been hearing our Heavenly Father's voice, whispering in the deep of our consciences, now saying, Do this, and now, Refrain from that. And it can hardly be that we have entirely forgotten it all. Some of us can remember but too well their first beginning in deadly sin; their first lie, their first theft, their first look or deed of conscious impurity: how the good Spirit whispered better things to their hearts, and they heard the Lord's voice saying within them, "O, do not this abominable thing which I hate;" and they, alas! would not attend nor obey; they went desperately on, turning their backs to God, and their face towards the Evil one; and this happened over and over, till at last their very consciences ceased to disturb them, and they committed the mortal and deadly sin, as a matter of course, slaying their own souls over again each time that they committed it. Surely when such unhappy men do at all come to themselves, they must be filled with wonder and amazement at Him Who so long endured them and so often repeated His call; and

while it overwhelms them with shame to think of their long abusing such goodness, they cannot but hope, that even such as they might be forgiven at last, seeing how earnestly He desires their salvation. Perhaps there were at the time special tokens of God's Presence: some text had just been read, or came suddenly into their mind, distinctly forbidding the crime to which they were tempted: perhaps it was suggested to them, "How do you know but this may be the turning point of your spiritual life? All that comes after may perhaps take its colour from what you do now. To resist this one temptation may crown your whole after-life; to yield to it, may fill all with bitterness, both in time and eternity." Perhaps, I say, some may have had such misgivings, and yet may have gone on, obeying their own corrupt hearts and committing the wickedness, choosing death instead of life. So it was, perhaps, many years ago. And yet He Whom they affront and pierce has permitted them all this time to stay here in our world of trial. They are not yet in the outer darkness, although they did so wilfully choose it for their portion, it may be, again and again. O my brethren, if anything like this be the true history of any one of us, what unwearied, what dutiful love is required on that man's part, in return for such astonishing patience. How is he bound, all the rest of his days, to watch for the slightest hint of his Saviour's will; never willingly to tire of waiting on Him, either in devotional services, or in the least of His members: to take always the lowest place, as knowing himself unworthy of any place at all: readily and thankfully to suffer wrong, pain, ill usage of every kind; because he has deserv-

ed it all, and worse, by his behaviour to his God. Whatever company that man is in, it will be natural for him always to regard himself, in the bottom of his heart, as the worst person in the company; knowing, as he does, what strivings, what inward motions of the Holy Ghost he has resisted; whereas of other men's misgivings he has no knowledge; he cannot tell how far *they* resisted the Holy Ghost, he only knows that *he* did so; and that knowledge, by the grace of God, will be sufficient to keep him humble and meek.

It may be, our Lord added to His inward call some providential circumstance or other, whereby His fatherly care was more evident, and your duty made more easy. Thus we hear and read of some who were startled and in the end preserved or converted, by seeing others fall very grievously into the same kind of transgression to which they are tempted. Their evil passions and bad companions carried them along, it may be, to the edge of deadly sin; they were in extreme danger, when some one whom they knew of, some one perhaps of their own bad companions or tempters, fell into something very scandalous and shocking, and they could not help perceiving that, except they repented, they were themselves in the way to the same. As if some young person among our Lord's own disciples, having been led away to commit some one act of pilfering, had been alarmed when he saw the miserable end of Judas Iscariot, whose pilfering led him in the end to betray our Saviour. We can easily imagine how any person, seeing this, would with horror leave off picking and stealing, even in the slightest instances, for ever. Just in the same way might any man in our own time

repent, when he saw those with whom he had sinned, with whom he had been warned, still sinning on and casting themselves quite away. Well might he repent, and well might he say to himself, "How am I better than this my poor companion, that the Providence of God hitherto preserved me from going so far as he has done in sin and misery? Truly if this goodness of my God does not lead me to repentance, I shall prove in the end far more wicked and miserable than he."

A thoughtful person, looking back on his past life, may also discern many instances of God's mercy in shielding him from temptation, and taking it out of the way, just at the time, perhaps, when he was most likely to have yielded to it. As we read in the history of David, how he had once given way to violent anger, and had sworn an oath to destroy Nabal who had affronted him; but God put it into the heart of Abigail, Nabal's wife, to meet him with a present, and speak words to him which allayed his fury; and he greatly blessed the Lord for it. Not much otherwise has the merciful God dealt with many among ourselves, putting it into the heart of his servants to say or read to us, perhaps without knowing it themselves, what might most quiet and correct our anger or other bad passions. Sometimes it has been something in the Sunday or week-day service, something in a lesson or sermon, which suited our case and helped us in our great need. Sometimes ordinary things happened, as men would say "by chance," and caused us to put by for a time our evil purposes and desires; as Saul, when he wanted to take and murder David, was interrupted by the news that the Philistines were come into the country.

Sometimes, yea by God's mercy very often, good and holy examples have been thrown in our way: we read in books, or we come in real life to know of persons who have quite got the better of the sin, to which we are tempted. The angry man reads or hears of Moses; the discontented man, of Job; the unchaste and dissolute man, of Joseph; the idle selfish man, of S. Paul; or he meets with some one who is meek, contented, in spite of severer trials than he has endured: the saintly example is presented to him at the very moment when he most needs it. Whether it prevail with him or no, we cannot surely doubt Who puts it in his way. It is all His gracious ordering, Who is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Yes indeed, He is most longsuffering: for only think how long, in how many cases, amid how grievous provocations He has gone on giving us all, as He knew to be best, these many opportunities of salvation. We may use His gifts or we may slight and abuse them: to us it makes all the difference, but in the gifts themselves it makes no difference at all. However we take them, they are in themselves equally instances of His infinite mysterious mercy.

We may use His mercies, or we may abuse them: He leaves us free to choose. O what an awful thought is that! A little while, and the choice will be no more free, He will bear with sinners no longer. Such as we are found in that day and hour, in or out of His favour, such we shall eternally remain. And for aught we know that day, that hour, may be now.

Lord, grant that these thoughts may make us careful how we live, that we may escape the bitter pains of eternal death!

SERMON XXII.

WATCHING FOR THE UNKNOWN DAY.

S. MARK xiii. 33.

“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.”

WHEN people expect any thing to happen to them, for which they know they ought to prepare themselves, they naturally begin presently to inquire, *when* it is likely to come to pass; they want to know the exact time. And when they do come to know it, very often it becomes a snare to them. The indolent, slothful, careless disposition, which is but too natural to all men since the sin of our first parents, causes us, too often, to put off those duties, for which we do not expect, for a long time, to be called to account. A child, for example, knows the precise time when he will be called on to say his lesson; and we know how apt he is, therefore, to delay learning it, until it is very near the time: a labourer knows that he has a certain piece of work to get through by such an hour, and he lets that hour come on as near as he dares, before he begins to work in earnest at all. Many other instances might be given: but these will be sufficient to make you understand that there may be a spiritual sloth also, extremely dan-

gerous to the soul of man, shewing itself in this particular form ; that people think they know, more or less, how much time God will allow them, and so think they need not take pains until they are, as they suppose, come near to the end of that time. It would greatly terrify them, could they be convinced that they were really on the edge of the world which never ends, so unprepared as they know themselves to be. But they too easily contrive to persuade themselves that they are as yet far enough from that world ; that they may sleep, or trifle, or riot on a little more, and yet there will be time sufficient for them to do all their work in.

By this, we may understand how great a mercy it is, that our Saviour has hid from us the exact time of the Last Day, as He has that of our own death. How carefully and strictly He has concealed the time when He will come to be our Judge, very many places in the Bible inform us. "The Day of the Lord," it was a proverb among Christians, "the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Our Lord Himself taught people this saying, where He says, "a This know, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also ; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." S. Peter and S. Paul both took this parable from Him. S. Peter, to reprove the unbelief of certain scoffers, says, "b But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night : when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall

^a S. Matt. xxiv. 43, 44.

^b 2 Pet. iii. 10.

melt with fervent heat: the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burned up." And S. Paul puts them in mind of it, as of a thing they could not be ignorant of: "° Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you; for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

But the most remarkable and mysterious place, to shew how the Almighty on purpose hides from us that awful time, is the verse just before the text. "° Of that day and that hour knoweth no man; no, not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Not even the Son knows it, in that He is Son of Man: it is no part of His prophetic mission. As some things were not known to Him, when He grew in wisdom and stature, so neither was this, even to the day when He uttered this prophecy to His disciples. Such seems to be, in part, the meaning of those remarkable words; but, however, it seems plain that God has some awful purpose connected with His judgements on the wicked, and on that world which has become accursed through them, which makes it necessary to hide the time of Judgement. But in the text a more merciful purpose too is not doubtfully declared: "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is." The time is concealed, on purpose to take away the temptation which I have just mentioned: it is kept back, that people might not, in their irreligious foolishness, fancy that it was far off, and time enough to get ready for it. Just as God, in His good providence, hides

° 1 Thess. v. 1, 3.

° S. Matt. xxiv. 36.

from us the time of our own death, so in the Gospel of His Son He hides from us the time of the Day of Judgement. We know that when persons have reason to think they shall be sent out of the world on this or that particular day, it often *seems* to work a change in them for the better, as the day draws on; they seem more tender-hearted, and listen more attentively to the warnings of God's messengers. But still there is no knowing, whether such repentance is real or not. We may have a faint hope, but we cannot at all depend on it. In like manner, had we been enabled to foreknow exactly when God will call us out of this state of trial, even if the thought did make us more serious as the time drew on, yet there would be less and less chance of a really good and hopeful repentance, less and less trial of our faith. The seriousness might be a kind of astounding fear, such as seems, alas! to fill the hearts of too many when they are on their death-bed, and to render them even incapable, as far as we can discern, of any real and abiding change of heart. But now the uncertainty of the time of our death leaves us, in a manner more at liberty to think of death or not, as we like; to prepare for it or not, according as we choose rather to attend to the counsels of God Almighty, or to the corrupt whispers of the world the flesh and the devil. God graciously leaves us to choose right for ourselves; that is, of course, by the help of His bountiful grace. But if we knew the exact time to be near, we should hardly be in a condition to choose: if we knew it to be what we call afar off, we should hardly, I fear, be minded to choose right.

And yet, in a certain sense, the Almighty has made known to us both the hour of death and also the Day of Judgement. He has hidden the exact hour and day, but He has set down certain limits, beyond which He has assured us they cannot be delayed. We know that the days of man, which were at first near a thousand years, and seem afterwards to have lessened by degrees, are now come down, taking one life with another, to seventy at the outside. "The days of our age are threescore years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow, so soon passeth it away, and we are gone." As much as to say, that they who shall live longest must not reckon upon living beyond seventy; and, even if they do, must not reckon upon doing more of their life's work, making their account more favourable, after that time; for then they must expect to fail both in mind and body. Thus, though no person living can say exactly in what year he shall die, yet we can all certainly name a year, in which every one of us now living will be out of this world, and waiting for their last account, if they have not already come to it. To make sure of taking it far enough off, let us say a hundred and fifty years. A hundred and fifty years hence, we may feel certain, every one of us, that all our brethren, who are now breathing the air of this world, will have ceased to do so; their souls will have been parted from their bodies, and they will be in the region where is no repentance, nor any such prayer as can change an evil lot to a good one. Can we not

imagine *this* to ourselves, if we will have a little faith, as easily as a person condemned to die can realize to himself where he shall be, this day month, or fortnight, or week? Surely, if we will, we may: not that, in any case, it is an easy matter to throw our hearts and minds forward, and in hope or fear imagine ourselves in the Paradise of God, or in the prisons of darkness. It is not an easy matter for men unaccustomed to such meditations: but it may be done, by God's grace and help; we may, if we choose, employ our leisure hours, the hours, for example, that we lie awake in our beds, in musing what our condition must needs be, when a hundred or a hundred and fifty years more shall have passed over this world, if it lasts so long. We shall either rest with Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, or with the rich man we shall lift up our eyes, being in torments. We shall be with Christ, which is "far better" than even an Apostle's condition in this imperfect world; or we shall be with the souls of the unrighteous, reserved unto the Day of Judgement to be punished. Though we can none of us say at all, on what day this will begin to be our state, yet we can presently, any one of us, name a day, which, when it comes, will find us in one or the other of these conditions.

And as it is with regard to our own lives, so also, in some measure, with regard to the Day of Judgement. Neither man nor angel knows exactly when it will be; yet certain events are foretold, a course of things is declared in the writings of the Apostles, which having come to pass, the end will very soon come. As God has given us tokens, which all men understand, of the gradual approach of the unknown

hour of death, so has He given tokens, plain enough to believers, of the no less certain, yet more silent and gradual approach of the unknown Day of Judgment. The tokens of coming death, all men know, are the changes which befall the bodies and minds of men; our hair turns grey, our strength decays, our sight, hearing, speech, is apt to fail us; our limbs tremble, our energy and activity is gone; we cannot remember things as we used to do. In like manner there are tokens of the old age of the world, such as are described in the prophecies of our Lord and of S. John: great afflictions, false Christs and false prophets, wars and rumours of wars, famines and troubles, the truth persecuted, iniquity abounding, the love of the greater part waxing cold. Whenever we see any of these things, and surely the youngest and the most inconsiderate of us all must have seen and heard of too much of this sort of sign, we see a token of the coming of our Lord, as surely as we see in grey hairs a token of old age in any particular person. A great deal of the news, that many of us listen after and read so eagerly, is such as ought to put us in mind continually that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh: that, as it is said in one of the books called Apocryphal, "the world hath lost its youth, and the times begin to wax old."

Now what the use of such decay in each particular person is, we see very well: namely, that being reminded by it, how soon he himself shall be dust and ashes, he should make haste to wean himself from a world, in which his stay will be so short. And, in like manner, when we see, by the prophecies, the sure decay and end of the world itself, and of all the

great things in it, this ought to make us very careful not to be carried away by any of those things: not to set our hearts upon any thing, not to seek to be happy in any thing, except what we have reasonable hope will stand the fire of the Day of Judgement. Every war, every plague, every disturbance in a country, every bad season, every gross wickedness, is a token of the coming of our Lord, a reason why we should set our faces towards Him.

Thus our faith is, in one sense, helped by the very things, which in another way, try it most severely. The wickedness of the world, and the love of most waxing cold, is a great temptation of course to us all: but let us look at it with an eye of faith, and we shall see in it a sign of Christ's coming to Judgement: that great event, the expectation of which, more than any thing besides, must help him, who recollects it, to resist temptation.

Our Lord has taught us, by the parable which presently follows the text, how we should ever have our eyes and ears open, and see and hear every thing with a relation towards that great Day. We should never consider any thing barely as it is itself, but always how far such and such an use of it will turn to our good or harm in the Day of Judgement. He compares Himself to "a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." He is indeed gone a far journey, into heaven, the heaven of heavens, the very throne of God. He is far away out of our sight, and the time of His return is uncertain. He left it so on purpose,

^f S. Mark xiii. 34.

that we might be always ready. The time of His return is quite uncertain, but our work and duty is not at all so. He has left it quite plain : He gave authority to His servants, and to every man his work : that is, He set over the rest the ministers of His holy Word and Sacraments ; and assigned, both to them and to us all, certain duties, which He would have us be doing when He comes again. He assigned to most men the honest labour of their hands ; to children, dutiful obedience to their parents and to all who are in their parents' place ; to servants, that they should be faithful to their masters ; to masters, that they should be careful of their servants ; to the rich, that they should be open-hearted ; to the poor, that they should be contented ; to the young, that they keep themselves pure, humble, sober-minded ; to the old, that they daily exercise themselves more and more in those graces, and in penitence for former breaches of them. This is the kind of work which the Master of our house, the Church, has given to every one of us ; and He has especially commanded the porters, those who stand in the Apostles' place, keeping the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, these He has especially commanded to watch. And not them only, but the word "watch," which is said especially to them for all our sakes, is said also to every one of the household for his own sake. Every one, besides his own proper business in the family, has this command given him, to be watching and waiting for his Lord, to be attentive and awake at all times, that he be not found sleeping at that particular time when his Lord shall return to call him to account.

If we were literally and outwardly so situated as our Lord has supposed in this parable, if our condition was that of servants, waiting in the night for an earthly master, and if our mind was that of loyal and dutiful servants, willing to please him, what would our conduct be? Should we not be continually looking up, and lifting up our heads when we began to grow weary, and running to the door, and watching every sound, whether we could distinguish his step at a distance? Should we not count the hours and watches of the night, from even till midnight, from midnight until cock-crowing, and from cock-crowing until the morning? Should we not keep our loins girded, our dress in order, and our lights burning, and feel afraid and ashamed at the thought of his coming suddenly and finding us sleeping? Would it not stay our sharp words, our dishonest deeds, our boisterous sports, our wanton liberties, our idle curiosity, our thoughtless neglect of our tasks? Should we be glad for our master, coming (as He will) without warning, to hear us speaking unkindly and railing at one another, the first thing when he opens the door? Had we not rather he found us busy about his work, than employed on our own selfish pleasure, diverting ourselves, with little or no care who are put out of their way by it, or how his business is neglected? And of course, above all things, we should be unwilling for him to find us in the act of dishonestly taking what was either his, or the property of a fellow-servant: we should sink into the earth rather than be found in any kind of impurity or unchastity, in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness. And though we were

free from such gross sins, yet surely we should not choose for Him to come, when our whole mind and thoughts were taken up with unprofitable fancies, childish inquiry into matters which have no concern to His service or our duty. All these things would naturally be avoided, by servants really watching for their Lord, as well as that general irreligion, which He here calls going to sleep.

Now, are we avoiding them all? Here is another Advent come, a solemn time for humbling ourselves in preparation for another Christmas: and we are so much nearer the great and dreadful Day. Have we made any good and sufficient preparation for it? Are we in a way to do so? Have we waked up? Are we looking about us? Are our loins girded about, and our lights burning? Or are we rather going on in an idle, careless, self-satisfied way, as if we had found out some way to be safe without continual watching and prayer; as if we might safely be unconcerned, while every year that passes by, every clock that strikes, every sun that sets, nay, every breath that we draw, has a voice given it from God to warn us of approaching Judgement? Friends, neighbours, Christian brethren, I beseech you think on these things; for depend on it, the best of us has a great deal to do, and the youngest will find he has but a short time.

SERMON XXIII.

THE LIGHTNING-LIKE COMING.

S. MATTH. xxiv. 27.

“As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.”

It seems almost natural to all men, that when any great thing is promised or expected, they look after signs and tokens of its coming to pass. For instance, how often have we heard people say, they expected such and such a person, who was ill, shortly to die, because of such and such a sign. The heathen, we know, in all ages carried this very far, inventing all manner of omens, tokens, and divinations. The Evil spirit prompted them to do so, endeavouring, if he could, to make them depend on something which was not God; and they are often reproved for it in the Old Testament. And no doubt this feeling after signs is connected with very sad and dangerous things. It requires a deep and ever-present sense of the One true God, Father Son and Holy Ghost, else it becomes what is called superstition; trusting to invisible creatures instead of God Almighty; and we have need to be very much on our guard against it. But if we try to walk with God always, and to have Him in all our thoughts, then, as He is sure to vouchsafe us tokens sufficient to guide us in our duty, and point out to

us the next thing to be done, so it cannot be wrong in us, humbly to look out and watch for such signs: as holy Simeon and devout Anna watched for the first Coming of our Lord. And He gave them prophecies for that very purpose; even as He has given us Christians plain prophecies of His second Coming. And we do well to read, and listen to and consider those prophecies: provided we do not pretend or endeavour to settle the meaning of the dark parts of them by our own frail reason and fancy, but submit ourselves to what we are plainly taught by the Church, and, in respect of what she leaves doubtful, humble ourselves, awaiting the event; as Moses told the children of Israel to “^astand still and see the salvation of the Lord:” their religious fear and trust in Him being not less, but greater, because they did not know *how* He would save them.

We do well then in looking out for the Last Day, and in wondering and musing very often, whether it may not even now be very near, quite at the doors, even according to our notion of a short time. But as our Lord warned the Jews, so has He warned *us* also not to be *curious* about His tokens; not to be nicely inquiring into all the particulars of dark prophecies, which nothing but the event can make clear. We see how it was in our Lord’s first Coming; how many of the best scholars among the Jews, many perhaps among those who best knew the words of the Bible, were entirely “put out,” as we say, when Jesus of Nazareth was made known to them. They had made up their minds, that so and so was the only meaning of the Scriptures; that Christ, when

^a Ex. xiv. 13.

He came, must come as a great earthly King; and so they could not receive the poor carpenter's son, as He seemed to be: and not believing, they became His betrayers and murderers. And generally, I suppose, we may say that all prophecies nearly, which we quite understand the fulfilment of, have been fulfilled in a different sense and manner from what the readers or hearers of them expected beforehand. Clearly then, it is not our Lord's will, that we should busy ourselves with enquiring *how* such and such things will come to pass: and clearly there is a danger, lest the Evil one himself prevail upon us to waste our time, and perhaps get into wrong notions, by giving way to such curiosity; instead of turning all to the uses of true devotion and religious practice.

Hear our Lord's own warning, addressed especially to those Christians, who should live in the latter times, when the Day should be drawing near, "If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before." Surely part of our Lord's meaning here is, that we, who have been made members of Him, should keep the faith and communion into which we were baptized, and not be tempted to go out we know not where, to seek that Saviour, Whom by His mercy, we have already abiding among us. Nay, He is abiding within us, if we have not driven Him out by grievous sin; and if we have, surely we

^b S. Matt. xxiv. 23—25.

must seek Him by repentance and confession within the Church, not by wandering, we know not where, out of it. “^c Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold He is in the desert; go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not.” We are not to be looking after new and strange signs of the coming of our Lord. His Scriptures and Sacraments, His Church with her Creeds and pastors, are signs enough that He is come already; come already to *try* and, if we will, to *save* us: and as to His second Coming to Judgement, when that shall really happen, there will be no need of private signs and tokens, making it known to one while it is hidden from another: but “as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of man be.” And as it would be foolish and even wicked in a sick person or those about him to spend their time and care in making out signs and tokens whether he should recover or no, instead of attending to the rules of the nurse and physician: so is it much more foolish and wicked for Christian people to be curious about things to come, about the ways in which God will deal with the world, while they neglect to prepare themselves for His coming by true repentance, earnest devotion, and real care to do all their duty.

Christ tells us, you see, quite plainly, that His coming will be like lightning. Let us see how this thought may help us in such serious preparation.

When we think of a flash of lightning, we think of something quite sudden, something which greatly startles people. And yet there has been a sort of

^c S. Matt. xxiv. 26.

preparation for it. Before lightning, most commonly, the sky, we know, is overcast, and a certain feeling runs through the air, so that we know there will be a thunderstorm before very long, either here or at no great distance. Sooner or later, we expect the thunder, and yet, when it comes, it startles us. So, for all the warnings of Scripture and the Church, those even, who most try to be ready, will find the coming of our Lord break suddenly upon them. A good many of the parables express this. The ten virgins knew that the Bridegroom would come some time in the night, but not exactly when: so at midnight, when the cry was made, "The Bridegroom cometh," they were one and all, wise and foolish, taken by surprise. In another parable, the servants who kept the house knew that their Lord would return from the feast before the next day, but in what watch of the night was uncertain. They knew not, whether He would come at even or at midnight or at cock-crowing or in the morning. And we know that, when persons watch in that way, the knock, coming at an uncertain time, startles them in spite of themselves; it gives them a sort of turn, though they have been all along expecting it. Another parable, which the Scripture has used more than once to express the same thing, is taken from the condition of a woman with child. She knows that her hour of pain will come on; that it will come on before such and such a time; night and day, perhaps for several weeks she may be awaiting it; and yet it comes on suddenly at last. S. Paul has pointed out this: "^d when they shall say, Peace and safety;

^d 1 Thess. v. 3.

then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

In each of these similitudes men are represented as having warning, yet being taken by surprise; knowing that the great change would come, and looking out for it more or less, but not knowing when; and so, astonished when it came. But elsewhere our Lord says, He will come, His Day will come, as a thief in the night: and, to one person He adds, "^ethou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." And it came very soon to be a proverb among Christians: so that S. Paul says to the Thessalonians, in that letter of his which was probably written earliest of all the books of the New Testament, "^fYe yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh, as a thief in the night." How were they to know it, except it were a saying among them? And how had it become a saying, except by the Apostles telling their converts what they had heard from our Lord's own lips? "^gKnow this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." That is, as a thief takes good care not to let it be at all known, which house he will next attack, and at what time, so our Lord, for wise and good ends, has provided that no mortal man, no not the Angels which are in Heaven, shall know the day and the hour of Judgement. So that it is in vain

^e Rev. iii. 3.

^f 1 Thess. v. 2.

^g S. Matt. xxiv. 43, 44.

for us to think, we have so much time yet to enjoy ourselves; so long, at least, we may safely put off the remembrance of the great and dreadful day. If we do so, we do it at our own peril: knowingly, at our own great and exceeding peril. And yet alas! how many do so: how many say, "There will be time enough yet!" And how can they depend on any the least fragment of time? They have been told beforehand. Who shall pity them, when they are at last overtaken and overwhelmed in a moment? Just as any one would say concerning a person struck by lightning, that it was his own fault, if he knew there would be a thunderstorm, and yet went out and wantonly exposed himself to it. It would be his own fault, though he had not been warned, and could not know, of that particular flash.

But again, the coming of our Lord is like lightning, not only in respect of its suddenness, but also in respect of its being seen everywhere at once. There will be no mistake about it. No one will think of saying, "Lo here, or lo there." Rather, as it seems, the glorious Lord will come in the height of Heaven, enthroned upon His white cloud; His sign, the Cross, borne before Him, and the host of Heaven around Him on every side. From the east He will be seen even to the west: the whole world will behold Him at once: there will be no unbelievers there: no one to ask, "^h Where is the promise of His Coming?"

Again, it will be a thrilling light! He will make Himself *felt* as well as *seen*: like as the flash of lightning is somehow perceived even by those whose eyes

^h 2 Pet. iii. 4.

are shut, or who are inclosed in a dark room: it quivers in a manner and pierces through them: it does not merely beam on them from a distance, like the sun from its place in the heavens, but it seems close to them, nay, and almost within reach of them. Such in that day, no doubt, will be the Redeemer's awful Presence: when the veil shall be withdrawn, and so many hearts shall in a moment become aware that He has been among them, has been dwelling within them, to be the very life of their souls, and they knew it not: either they would not know, or, knowing, they wilfully turned away from it. But now there will be no more indifference among them; no more cold neglect: though there may be, alas! hatred and despair. The piercing flash will make itself felt, even as the sound of the trumpet will make itself heard, by those who are spiritually as well as bodily dead. The trumpet shall sound the most thrilling of all notes: and that, against which it is least possible to stop your ears. It was heard once on mount Sinai. When the children of Israel, one and all, begged to hear it no more, *they* were permitted to remove and stand afar off: but at the time, of which we are speaking, there will be no such permission: the fearful sight and sound will be close to each of us, will seem as it were within us; there will be no escape: only, if we have given up beforehand our eyes and ears and souls to our merciful Saviour, to do His will, and to be purified by His grace, He will strengthen them to endure all this. In that way we may be safe, but no otherwise.

Some there are, we know, who will be fain, if they could, to hide their eyes from that light: but the

lightning will be too keen for them. They will cry to the rocks, “ⁱFall on us: and to the hills, cover us; and hide us from the Face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” They will be like persons who are alarmed in a violent storm, who hold their hands before their faces, but in vain; for the lightning is too swift and vivid for them, they are even forced to know of it, when it comes. So the wicked, Christ’s enemies and foes, will strive in vain to withdraw themselves from His presence, to withdraw their eyes from Him.

Yet more: as the flash not only enlightens, but frequently burns also; so the brightness of the offended Saviour coming to judge will set fire to the world: as it is written, “^kThere shall go a fire before Him and burn up His enemies on every side;” “^lThere shall go before Him a consuming fire:” “^mThe earth also and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.” Finally: as there are few things to be seen in this lower world outwardly purer and more beautiful in themselves than the bright gleams of summer lightning, when, without angry thunders, without setting anything on fire, it seems to wrap itself round heaven and earth in a moment: so are we permitted to think of Him, Whose Countenance is not only like lightning, but as the sun shineth in His strength, how in that day His unspeakable beams, so terrible to the wicked, will temper themselves, so as to be nothing but joy and glory to the good and penitent: how in a moment He will diffuse Himself over the whole world of His elect, from the east even unto

ⁱ S. Luke xxxii. 30. Rev. vi. 16.

^k Ps. xcvi. 3. P. Bk.

^l Ps. l. 3.

^m 2 S. Pet. iii. 10.

the west, enwrapping all, thrilling through all, changing and glorifying all, as when He Himself was transfigured: unlike however unto the lightning in this one respect, that the flash of lightning, such as we see, passes off in a moment and is gone, but the Light of that all-glorious Countenance shall never never die away. Such as we shall see it in that moment (if we be so happy as then to find mercy), such it will abide round us and within us, only with increasing brightness, to everlasting ages. For then we shall be inmates of that city, concerning which it is written, it hath “ⁿno need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” “^oAnd there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light.”

The light of the Lord, the Judge, we must all in our measure see: but whether we shall see it as fire in hell, or as glory in Heaven, *that* depends upon ourselves: upon the use we make of our eyes and other senses now. May He grant us well to consider this!

ⁿ Rev. xxi. 23.

^o Ib. xxii. 5.

SERMON XXIV.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS^a. I.

THE WARNING CALL.

ROM. xiii. 12.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”

I do not know that we can well find a more profitable subject for our meditations on the four Fridays of this Advent, than the four collects appointed by the Church for the four several weeks. The first of them, which we have now been using for nearly a week, is appointed also, as you know, to be repeated during the whole season: being in fact a prayer that we may use that season aright. For the petition which we here ask of God is, that we may cast away all evil works, and clothe ourselves in all good works, before it is too late: and the very purpose of the season of Advent is, to remind us that it will soon be too late. Let us try, for a short time, to think earnestly of these things; for indeed they are more to us than any thing else can be.

^a These four sermons on the collects were the summing up of catechising after the 2nd lesson at the Evening Service.

First of all, we prayed God this morning, and we shall presently pray Him again, that He would give us grace to "cast away the works of darkness." What are "the works of darkness?" Evidently such works as men commonly choose to do in darkness, i. e. wicked works. For as our Lord says in another place, "^b Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." Sloth, for instance, and drunkenness are works of darkness; for it is written, "^c They that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night." Thieving is a work of darkness; for "^d in the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked to themselves for robbery in the day time." Adultery and sinful lusts are works of darkness; we know how people, who are not grown utterly shameless, labour to hide their transgressions in that kind. "The eye of the adulterer," saith Job, "^e waiteth for the twilight, saying, no eye shall see me, and disguiseth his face." These then are the works of darkness; and even as, when the day breaks, men are forced for a time to give over such doings as these, so much more, when Advent comes, the token of *His* arising, Who is the true light, it is high time to put off all these things, once and for ever.

And you may observe that the Apostle's word is, not simply "put off" but, "cast away." We are to cast and throw from us all such wicked and shameful doings, with disdain and abhorrence, as though we could not hate them enough: just as if any person had taken up a serpent, or any other loathsome

^b S. John iii. 20. ^c 1 Thess. v. 7. ^d Job xxiv. 16. ^e Ib. 15.

and venomous reptile in his hand, he would presently shake it out, and cast it from him with disgust.

And we are not only told to rid and purge ourselves of these, but also to provide and keep the contrary virtues. "Let us cast away the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light." As if, when the light is just about to shine forth in the morning, some friend should come to the room where a man is sleeping, and stir him up, to prepare himself and be ready to set about his day's work; so does the Apostle, in this and every Advent, knock at the door of our hearts. He cries aloud to us in our Saviour's Name, and if we are not very dead asleep, very dull and hard-hearted indeed, we can hardly help starting up and attending to him. What is his cry? "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." This time of ours on earth, which is in comparison but a night, not shewing things as they really are, full of temptations and hindrances to the doing of God's work, this our earthly time is far spent; the day, the open and clear day of the other world, is at hand. The darkness of the evil world will soon pass, and Jesus Christ, the true light, will shine forth, and wake us all up, whether we be willing or no: well for those whom He, when He comes, shall find watching; already awake, and dressed, and with their prayers said, and ready to be employed in any work which He may set them.

And as persons when they are called, and arise in the morning, presently begin to put on their clothes, so the Apostle invites us, and we pray in the Church for help, to put on the armour of light: the clothes which are proper to be worn in the day time, while

we are about our work, and the full light is shining upon us. And these clothes are called "armour," because our condition in this world is a warfare, a continual war against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and our calling is that of soldiers; and has been so ever since that time, when we were sealed "with the sign of the Cross, in token that we were to fight under Christ's banner, and to continue His faithful soldiers." Now what this Christian clothing, or armour of light is, we know from other places of Holy writ. There is "the shield of faith;" entire belief in the great things out of sight. There is "the helmet of salvation;" hope, that through Christ we may be saved, on our true repentance and dutiful obedience. There is the "breastplate of love" and true charity, to guard our hearts from evil and selfish desires. There is "the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of God;" His holy commandments, deeply fixed in our heart, and always ready for our use, that by the remembrance of them we may put away proud, unkind, impure, foolish imaginations. This is the armour of light: these are the portions of a Christian man's armour, which lie, as it were, by his bedside, when he awakes in the morning, and which Christ expects him to put on, as he would his clothing, to prepare himself for the duties of the day. How is he to put it all on? By good thoughts and good resolutions; considering beforehand what he will have to do that day; what temptations he is likely to meet with, and how he may best prepare against them. And this cannot be, without earnest prayer; therefore the Christian warrior will be very punctual and very attentive in his morning prayers.

And when this time of Advent comes, which is so far like the morning, in that it is a new beginning, the Church opening her new year, we shall, if we are wise, be yet more diligent than usual in attending to our Lord's call, throwing aside all encumbrances, girding on our armour, and saying our prayers. Too much reason have we, most of us, to look upon the time past as a night, wherein we have been either asleep, or doing what we were ashamed of. Yet, if we will so use it, this Advent may prove to us a blessed morning; we may, if we will, wake up at the call of our Saviour, and begin dressing ourselves, and doing His work.

But we know how it often happens, when people are "lying down, loving to slumber," and the morning comes suddenly upon them, and some one cries out, "Awake, thou that sleepest." Many are obstinate in their sleepiness, and refuse to hear the voice; they turn on the other side, and say, Why am I disturbed? I will seek my slumber again. Or if they are awakened, they are content to lie awake, thinking of getting up and dressing and doing their work, and so time passes, they little think how much, and very likely, it becomes too late for their task to be done at all that day; or at any rate, they cannot do so much, nor so well, as if they had started up at once. So it is, still more commonly alas! in the great work of answering Christ's call, preparing for judgement, and saving our souls. How many of us never quite open their ears to the morning invitations, the Advent calls of our Saviour! We are aware, we cannot deny it to ourselves, that He is really there, that He is standing at our door and knocking; but we are con-

tent to have a very dim, unreal and ineffectual consciousness of His Presence: we go on slumbering in our sins and carelessness, and think, perhaps, now and then, of getting up by and by; and in the mean time the hours pass away, and it may no more be said to us, "The night is far spent, the Day is at hand," but rather, alas! "The day is far spent," the day of your trial here as a Christian; and the night, the night in which "no man can work," the night of death and judgement is hard at hand, and what have you done? what are you doing now? Can it be at all said that you are preparing for it? How fearful is this danger! how inexcusable this trifling with our God, and with our souls! Only give ear again to the Church's collect. It prays that we may do what ought to be done, "now in the time of this mortal life," "that in the last day, we may rise to the life immortal." Thus our two lives are set one against the other: one very short, the other as long as Eternity: the one coming presently to the grave and gate of death, the other never coming to any end at all. And yet the two are so wonderfully connected, that the life to come shall depend entirely on this life, and by the proper or improper employment of our brief moments here, it will be determined, how we shall pass the never-ending ages, that are to come after death. You think it a trifle, perhaps, how you pass this or that hour, what words you say, what thoughts you indulge, how you behave yourself in this or that business or amusement. Believe me, dearly beloved, it is no trifle: it will tell, for good or for evil, upon your soul for ever; though it be but an idle word, you will have to give account of it.

And if all this seems too high and strange for you, as if your minds could not at all take it in, nor think how such poor weak beings and their ways should be of so much consequence, remember once more the teaching of the collect; remember that to visit and save us, and such as we are, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came once in great humility: that, to try and judge such as we are, He will soon be here again in His glorious Majesty. Surely what He cares so much for, must be great and serious, and worth our caring for, how simple and trifling soever it may seem to us.

I entreat you, therefore, for God's sake, do not stay considering, whether it is really worth your while to set about holy duties, such as prayer and Communion, but, having been called, awake and bestir yourselves at once. The night of our world is far spent; the day of God's world is at hand. You may hide your eyes and stop your ears, and try to bury yourself again in your sinful slumbers; but none of all this will prolong your time, or stay the coming of your Lord one moment, any more than your shrinking under the bed clothes will keep the sun back from rising. In His own time He will be here: even now He stands at the door and knocks, and very soon He will be in the room. What would you wish to be found doing when He comes in? Drinking, and rioting, and making merry? Practising unclean ways, and gazing and longing after evil things? Striving and quarrelling and grudging against one another? Surely not, my brethren: you would not wish to be so found of Him: nor yet that, coming suddenly, He should find you sleeping. Rather you

would desire, that He may find you kneeling on your knees, in fervent prayer, confessing your many sins: or waiting on some of those whom He calls His brethren, busy about some work of mercy: or patiently enduring His chastisements: or, at least, honestly and religiously going on with the task which His Providence orders for you. This is how we would *wish* to be found. Let us not only wish, but pray and strive, and by His grace we shall be found so doing indeed.

SERMON XXV.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS. II.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

Ps. cxix. 105.

*“Thy word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light
unto my paths.”*

As the first collect in Advent prays generally, that we may walk as in the light, casting away from us the works of darkness, and so may be found ready when our Lord comes to judge the world; so the second collect prays in particular, that we may make a good use of Holy Scripture for that purpose. For the Scriptures of God, and His ministers, are the two great helps, which God has given us in His Church, whereby to know His blessed will. And we remembered the Scriptures ~~last Sunday~~ ^{in our} collect, as we shall the ministry, next Sunday. (For this has been our petition now for nearly a week; that He Who has given us the Bible would help us so to use it, as that we may live and die in good hope of going to Heaven through Jesus Christ.)

This prayer cannot be well said without due consideration, what Holy Scripture is. The Bible is now become a very cheap and common book; and the most part of us are apt to take it in hand too lightly. But here we are put in mind what it is:

it is that which God Himself has caused to be written. This is a great, and an awful thought. We are told concerning people in the East, whether Christians or unbelievers, that, on their receiving a letter from their sovereign lord, they reverently kiss the seal, and hold the letter to their forehead, in token of deep veneration and respect. So, and much more, ought we to mind well what we are about in our dealings with the message of the great God of heaven and earth. His message, His word, is Scripture. Every one of our Bibles, however we use it, is as truly and really His especial gift to us, as if, like the two Tables given by Moses, it were graven on stone by the very finger of God, and reached out unto us from the cloud on the top of Sinai. Did you ever really consider this? Did you ever look at your own Bible with this thought?

Observe the deep and earnest way in which Moses, in the Book of Exodus, speaks of those two Tables of the law. “^aThe tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.” Just the same may we say of every Bible, however ill-used or neglected: it is the work of God, and its contents are the writing of God. You know how you would hold your breath and hearken, if your Lord were to speak from heaven: well, you have His very words in that Book: it is the same, as if He really did speak to you from heaven. In our too familiar use of our Bibles, we are sadly apt to forget this. We take them as matters of course, as being what every body has. Yet three quarters of mankind never saw or heard of a Bible; and for you

^a Ex. xxxii. 16.

and me to have the use of one is indeed a mark of God's distinguishing favour. If we neglect or abuse it, woe unto us!

The Bible is God's word written; just as what our Lord spake on earth was God's word spoken. And why was it written? The collect tells us; "for our learning." Not surely for a lesson-book, that we might spell and read, and know certain portions of it, and be able to answer questions. Another book far less precious might have done as well for that. And for what sort of learning God's Holy Scriptures were intended, the collect goes on to explain. It prays that we may first "hear and read" the Scriptures, next that we may "mark them," thirdly that we may "learn," and fourthly that we "may inwardly digest them," not any how, but so as to make sure of "the blessed hope of everlasting life." Let us turn our thoughts for a little while to each of these four petitions.

This collect supposes first, that we all hear or read the Holy Scriptures. Most of us, I hope and believe, are by this time able to read them, although I am aware some are not. Some have never had much chance of learning; some, who might have learned long ago, would not take the trouble of doing so; and some out of idle and careless ways, to which they have given themselves up since, have lost what skill in reading they once had. To such as these I would say particularly, that, since they are without one great help towards the knowledge of God's will, they are the more bound to be very particular in their use of the other help; especially if their disadvantage is at all through their own fault. Since

they cannot read, they are the more bound to hear. How may they hear? Perhaps they have some kind friend or kinsman, who is willing sometimes to read to them at home. Perhaps some child of their's has gone to school, and has gotten him more learning than his parents, and they may, if they will, hear some parts of God's Book, daily out of the mouth of that little one, before some meal, it may be, or after they have come home from their work. At any rate, there is one place open to them, where, as they very well know, they are sure to hear God's word, if they will but seek it. Every morning and evening, you know, certain portions of that Holy word are read in order at Church; and on Sundays more than usual, besides the sermons, in which God's messengers explain to them, now one text, now another. The doors are not shut against them: they may, if they will, come in and hear God's word regularly. Do you think it is any excuse for them now, or will be so at the last day, for them to say they are no scholars; they could not read in God's Book? Nay; the Judge will surely say to them, "If you could not read, you could hear; the Church was at such a distance and you might have attended. You knew not your Master's will, for want of trying to hear it, and so you did things contrary to it." I fear such ignorance as this will be no excuse: you must still expect "to be beaten with many stripes."

I go on to the next case; that of those who can not only hear but read. I am afraid that, even now, too many of them go on in such a way that their Bibles, which they leave in dust on their shelves, are even now, in God's hearing, bearing silent wit-

ness against them. They think not at all of it, as they go in and out day after day, and see their Bible, Testament, or Prayer Book, with their other books, in a corner of the room. They take no notice of them, one way or another; and when they do find a little time to read, instead of their Bibles, they take up some newspaper or anything else which comes in their way, full of nothing but worldly things. They take no notice of their Bibles and good books. But are those books altogether unnoticed? Not so. There are Angels in the room both good and bad, who observe watchfully what Christians do with such treasures. Your good Angel rejoices, when he sees you take your Bible with a devout heart; your enemy rejoices too after his fashion, when he sees you pass it over, and always, or almost always, turn rather to some book of worldly amusement. I hope you will sometimes think of this, especially at holy penitential times, such as this of Advent, or in Lent; when we ought all to be preparing ourselves for Christmas or Easter.

Some again, to whom God has given both Bibles and the power of reading them, go near unhappily to throw away the blessing, in that they make it an excuse for not serving God diligently in His Church. They say, "I read what is good at home; what more could I get at Church?" Why; the Book which they profess to honour tells them. By going to Church the Bible promises them they will meet Jesus Christ our Lord, Who has promised to be there, with those who are gathered together. For, being there, they are gathered together in His Name; but He has not promised to put His Name wherever people read their

Bibles at home. His Name will not be with them, if they go on undutifully : and surely they do go on undutifully, if when He plainly told them not to "forsake the assembling of themselves together," they nevertheless neglect their Church.

Thus we see, that God would have us, according to the collect, diligently hear the Holy Scriptures, all of us ; and as many as can, read them also. Next, we pray that we may likewise mark them, that is, attend to what we read and hear. Too well do most of us know, how much reason there is for such a prayer. As it is hard in childhood to fix one's mind steadily on any thing, so as we grow older, the Evil one is always busy, contriving to make it particularly hard for us to mind what we say when we are praying, or what we read or hear in good books. As it is in our Lord's parable, "the wicked one cometh, and catcheth away that which is sown in our hearts, lest we should believe and be saved." Therefore we have great need to pray, that we may not only hear and read, but "mark." Else the least harm that can happen to us will be, that we shall continue, all our lives long, children in spiritual understanding, never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. But it is more likely, that if we allow ourselves to be inattentive in Church or in our reading of the Bible, we shall soon grow careless of our duty to God altogether.

But there is something yet, more than marking. We pray that we may "learn." What is learning? and how is it more than marking? Our school lessons may teach us the difference. Suppose, I tell a boy an interesting story ; such an one, for example, as

that of Joseph and his brethren; he is sure almost to attend to it, whilst one is speaking or reading it, that is, he is sure to "mark" it. But, unless he is a thoughtful and rather an industrious boy, he is not by any means so sure to "learn" it. He will not get it rightly into his own mind, so as to think of it properly, and be able to repeat it exactly to another person. So it is plain that, in order to learn one's duty from the Scriptures, one must not only attend to what they say, but treasure it also, and lay it up in our hearts, to be ready for use when the time comes. Having "heard the word," we must "keep it." It must not be let go, as it too easily will be, among the manifold distractions of the world and the flesh, unless we strive and pray to remember and recollect it.

Yet once again, this good word of God, thus read or heard, marked and learned, must also be "inwardly digested." Now you know what is meant, when physicians talk of the food which a man eats, being digested. They mean that it agrees with him, nourishes him, is changed, as it ought to be, into the substance of his body. So the word and commandments of God, made known in Holy Scripture, are inwardly digested, when a man so receives them, as that they shall enter into his temper and character, become, as it were, part of himself. How may that be? There is but one way. We must actually do as God bids us. Even as bodily exercise is needed for bodily digestion, so the practising of the commandments is needed, in order to the Gospel's being inwardly and spiritually digested. A man may hear, e.g. the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal,"

when he comes to Church ; he may read it at home in his Bible ; he may observe it at the time, and learn it by heart, so as to be able, when asked, both to say and to explain it. But I do not yet know, whether he has inwardly digested it. He must be honest in thought, word and deed, so will the command, as it were, grow into him, and become part of his nature. And it is just the same with all other commandments. Earnest endeavour to keep them, with prayer to God, and diligent use of the sacraments, will make them, in the end, part of a man's self : so that, as an Angel would not break them, neither will he. This is perfection. It belongs to a better world. But no one can say, how near we may come to it, even in this world, by the right use of the Scriptures, in the several ways which I have now explained to you from the collect. By simply attending to what the Bible teaches, laying it up and practising it, " we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ : " not the false hope of the bad and careless Christian, which he makes out of his own fancies and the whisperings of the Evil one ; but the true, the blessed, the unfailing hope ; the hope which nothing but true penitence, earnest faith, and dutiful obedience can give. Lord ! evermore give us this hope ; that our Bibles may be a blessing to us indeed, and not our accusers in the Day of Judgement. If this be really our mind, if we are keeping the commandments, and that with patience, no fear but we shall have comfort enough. The good Saviour, Who means to bring us to heaven and to Himself at last, He will take care that we shall not faint by the way.

SERMON XXVI.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS. III.

THE MINISTRY.

S. MATT. xxii. 3.

“He sent His servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding.”

THAT is, God the Father, having united His Nature to our's for ever by the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation of His Son, sent the Apostles, and through them His ministers of all degrees, to invite all men to partake of so great a blessing. This is that other great help to salvation, over and above Holy Scripture, which our Church mentions in her third collect for Advent; as in the second collect which we used last week, she had made mention of Holy Scripture. There, we acknowledged God's goodness in causing the Bible to be written for our learning: here, in sending His living messengers, the clergy: and both, to prepare His way against His second Coming. As we cannot be ready for it without the Bible, so neither can we be ready for it, in a general way, without the ministry. We want the written word; we want also the living and spoken word, to bring us to heaven. Even as in old times, before the first Coming of our Lord, His way was to be prepared, partly by the

written word of the Old Testament, partly by the Church, the Priests and Levites, who were to offer the appointed sacrifices, and fulfil the other services according to the law.

The collect indeed does not speak of the old Priests and Levites, generally. It only speaks of one, S. John the Baptist, who came, as you know, immediately before our Saviour. His father, Zacharias, was a priest of the family of Aaron; therefore he too was a priest. For the priesthood among the Jews did not depend, as among us, on the laying on of hands, but went on in the line of Aaron from father to son. S. John the Baptist was also a Prophet; the last of the long line of Prophets, whom God raised up from time to time, to declare His will to His people Israel, as lights shining in a dark place, until Christ, the perfect Day, should dawn. S. John was a prophet, and more than a prophet, because he came nearer to our Lord than any of the rest. He did not only foretell, that Christ would come, but he pointed to Him as being already come. S. John is therefore in many ways a type and pattern of the Christian Ministry in the Church. Our Lord sent S. John as His messenger, to prepare His way before Him on His first Coming. So He sends the Bishops and priests of the Church, to prepare the world for His second Coming. When the Israelites of that time heard of S. John preaching in the wilderness, and came out to see and listen to him, it moved them much, to see and hear things so very unlike the ordinary way of persons going on in the world, "a man clothed with camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat locusts and wild honey;" all rude and rough, such as one

might find in the wilderness: to hear his earnest calls to repentance; to behold the multitudes who came to him to be baptized in the river of Jordan: and what an effect his preaching had on them, making them confess even their most grievous sins. All this they saw with wonder, and of course had a great deal to say and think about it. But S. John would not let them waste their time in thinking of him; he told them, all their thought should be of One mightier than he was, coming after him: and so whatever thoughts people have about clergymen generally, or about this or that clergyman, the only right way of thinking, as you all know if you will but consider, is to regard us, one and all, as messengers sent by our Lord before His Face to give warning of His coming to judgement. This is a serious thought, my brethren; a very serious thought both for us and for you. As the gospel of Christ's kingdom being preached in all the world is a token that the end will soon come, so the presence of a clergyman, his doing duty, and going about his work in the parish, is a sure sign and pledge from Him who will come to be our Judge; a sign that He will soon be here, and that the inhabitants of that parish will have a strict account to give. Of course, it requires some thought to get this properly into our minds. When S. John began to preach, with his rough unusual garment, it was something so much out of the common, that every one was in a manner awakened by it; they could scarcely help attending to what he should say. But we are used to see, in every place, persons whom we know at first sight to be clergymen, and to take it for granted that there will be such in every parish;

it is nothing at all strange to us ; therefore we are apt to pass it over without any special thought. Yet when we do attend to it, we must surely perceive that the presence of a priest is the same kind of warning to us, that the presence of the Baptist was to the Jews of that time. The clerical dress, both in the Church and out of it, may well serve us for the same purpose, that S. John's raiment and girdle served the people of Judea then. That is, it may put us in mind of God Almighty, of Jesus Christ coming to be our Judge, of our own souls, and of the Last Day.

And this so much the more, as we, who minister in the Church of God, whether worthily or unworthily, have a trust in some respects greater than what S. John had ; according to the word of Him Who is the Truth : "^a Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater prophet than John the Baptist, but he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Because the Baptist could only baptize with water unto repentance ; but Jesus Christ, Who hath promised to be with him that is least in the kingdom of heaven, He baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. S. John's baptism was only a sign ; but Christ's Baptism, as the Catechism says, is a real "death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness." Again S. John could only point to our Lord, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God:" but every priest in the Church hath power to give the Body and Blood of Christ : which, as the Catechism says again, "are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." Now this is just what our collect means, when it calls us,

^a S. Matt. xi. 11.

after S. Paul, ministers and stewards of the mysteries of Christ. The mysteries are chiefly the two holy Sacraments, and the clergy are stewards of them, because to the clergy they are committed. So far we are more highly trusted than even our Lord's first messenger, S. John the Baptist. We have our Lord, not to point to at a distance, but actually to give, in His two Sacraments. By these, and by the mysteries of His Word also, we are to prepare and make ready His way; His way, to come among our people, and take them to Himself. If they are disobedient, (as all naturally are) they must be converted; their hearts must be turned; "turned to the wisdom of the just;" turned and changed from their wicked and worldly thoughts to have such thoughts as those have who are truly good and just. In this respect S. John's preaching was just what ours ought to be. As he had to preach repentance, so have we. Only, whereas he said, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" we say, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is already come: you are already in it, and so much the worse for you, if you are going on in any known sin, or wilfully neglecting any known and plain duty." Thus our work is the same as S. John's; to prepare our Lord's way by preaching of repentance; by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

But now mark, how the collect concludes. It prays that Christ's ministers may so do their work on earth, that at His second coming we may be found an acceptable people. See here, what is the true measure, the certain test of things going on well in Christ's Church. It is, our being found acceptable,

that is, pleasing in His sight, when He comes again to judge the world. It is not anything which we can now see or judge of. For example, it will not do for any one to pronounce positively that such and such a priest is doing his duty well, that such and such a parish is going on well in God's sight. All we can properly say is, that so it appears to us; but whether it be so in earnest, God only knows for certain. And He will not, in a general way, let us know, until the general account is given. Now this is an awful and serious thought for us all, in many ways. A fearful thing it is to consider. While we perhaps are pleasing others and flattering ourselves, that surely we are doing well, that our souls are in the right way, the all-seeing Eye, which is ever upon us, may discern in us some secret sin, growing and growing, and eating out the heart of all our goodness: that while a man is preaching to others and, it may be, doing them much good, he may be giving way to some lurking corruption, which may cause him in the end to be a cast-away. Well may this alarm each one of us for himself, and make us very diligent in prayer and self-examination. And S. Paul, in this week's Epistle, makes mention of another effect which it ought to have upon us. "Judge nothing," he says, "before the time, until the Lord come." Do not be eager and hasty in passing sentence, in saying, "This man is good, I wish I was like him, I should then certainly be saved:" much less can it be right to pass unfavourable sentence upon any; to say, "At any rate, I am not as he is:" like that unhappy Pharisee, who thanked God that he was so much better than the Publican. The only safe way

is, to judge nothing before the time, to look to our own souls very carefully, and to the souls of others also, with whom we are charged, but not to be busy in talking and judging about any. The moment we begin to amuse ourselves with that, we give an advantage and triumph to the enemy. It is just what he wants, that we should be talking instead of doing; minding other people, to whom we can do no good, instead of watching, judging, correcting ourselves. Therefore, my brethren, let us all beseech God, that He would turn the eyes of our hearts inwardly upon our own consciences; that when our Lord shall come in His glory, He may find us not comparing and judging, but repenting and amending: the priests watching, the people obedient. Blessed is that fold, that parish and congregation, which the Great Shepherd and Bishop, when He cometh shall find so doing. O Lord, grant that it may be so with us!

SERMON XXVII.

THE ADVENT COLLECTS. IV.

THE CRY FOR HELP.

S. MATT. viii. 25.

“ His disciples came unto Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us we perish.”

IN the three first Advent collects we look on distinctly to the Day of Judgement, the final Coming of our Lord, and we beseech Him to prepare us for it. In the collect for the first Sunday, we ask Him in general that we may be ready ; the works of darkness cast away, and the armour of light put on. In the second collect, we beseech God to bless us in our use of Holy Scripture, as one of the chief helps which He has given to bring us to heaven. In the third, we speak to Him of the holy ministry, the succession of Bishops and priests in His Church, and pray that it may prosper in the work whereunto He ordained it, i.e. the conversion of men's hearts, that we may be found “ an acceptable people at His second Coming to judge the world.” All these petitions you see refer expressly to that second Coming. But this which is appointed for the fourth and last week in Advent takes rather a different tone.

It speaks, not so much of a future deliverance

which the faithful hope for at the end of the world, but of relief wanted immediately, from urgent, overwhelming distress. "O Lord, raise up, we pray Thee, Thy power and come among us, and with great might succour us." As if the Almighty had, as it were, gone to sleep, and left us for a time to ourselves : as He did once go to sleep in a vessel, on the sea of Galilee, and when a great storm rose, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full, the disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we perish : carest Thou not that we perish?" Upon which our gracious Lord arose, and "rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still ; and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." That short, and earnest prayer of the Apostles, "Lord, save us, we perish," is the very pattern of a prayer for a Christian man to use when troubles and temptations come thick upon him, so that he scarcely knows which way to turn. It is a good prayer for the whole Church, in the time of persecution, decay, or distress. She knows that her Lord is with her ; for He has promised to be with her always. So far the Christians of all times are like the Apostles. But as He was asleep, so it often seems to our timid eyes and minds, as if He had forsaken us, and were gone to sleep : and then we naturally betake ourselves to earnest prayer, as the Apostles did, "Lord, save us, we perish : " "O Lord, raise up, we pray Thee, Thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us." It is not only a prayer, but a cry ; the cry of helpless creatures, in overpowering distress and anguish, to Him Who alone can help and deliver them. It answers to the cry of the Israelites by the

shore of the Red Sea, the sea before and the Egyptians behind; to the prayer of Jonah when he was in the whale's belly, when he said, "^a I am cast out of Thy sight; yet will I look again," just once more will I look again, "toward Thy holy temple."

It is like Hezekiah's prayer in his sore sickness, when he seemed at the point of death: "^b O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me:" or still more is it like the sharp and eager cries of many who came to our Lord, as their only hope of healing from violent or wasting complaints, "^c Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief:" "^d Lord, come down ere my child die:" "^e Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean:" "^f Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." These, and many more outcries of those who came to our Lord in distress are in effect the same as the collect for this week: they are petitions, "that He would raise up His power, and come among us, and with great might succour us." That is what we pray for: and the time seems long to us, because of our great need; as it seemed long to the children of Israel in the wilderness; as it seemed long, no doubt, to Jonah whilst he waited in the whale's belly; to Martha and Mary, while Christ tarried, and did not come directly to heal their brother Lazarus; and to S. Peter after his denial, until he saw his Lord again, thoroughly to humble himself, and to turn that way ever after. Just so the time seems long both to the bereaved Church, and to particular Christians in affliction. The souls of the martyrs, pleading for the Church, cry out, "Lord, how long dost Thou not avenge her cause?"

^a Jonah ii. 4.^b Isa. xxxviii. 14.^c S. Mark ix. 24.^d S. John iv. 49.^e S. Matt. viii. 2.^f S. Luke xvii. 13.

So the afflicted agonizing Christian calls out, "O Lord, make haste to help me." But here the question might well arise; How comes all this pain, and distress, this fear and anxiety in the Church, now for so many years the chosen and happy Bride of Christ? and how is it that Christian people, long since baptized and put in reach of so high graces, find themselves yet in so great straits? Why, the collect itself gives the answer. It is, "through our manifold sins and wickedness." Our sins, and nothing else, are the cause, why we are "sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us." It is our own sins then, my brethren, from which we ask to be delivered; and that speedily. Whether we consider the whole Church or the soul of each one of us in particular; our sin is so great an evil, and we so frail and helpless, that we know not how to be delivered from it, except by Christ's coming especially, by His grace and providence, to deliver us. For this therefore the Church has instructed us to pray, now that we are so near the very hour of His first coming.

That our prayer may not be in vain, let us think a little, how it is, that the sins and wickedness of Christians do so hinder them in their Christian task, in doing God's work, and running His race. It does not always seem so to themselves. On the contrary, when a man is in the way of indulging any one bad desire, which has come to be a favourite with him, he is apt to fancy that he does not go on the worse for it in other respects. The angry, the covetous, the proud and vain, nay oftentimes even the dishonest and the unclean, not only say, but really think, that they are in earnest in their devotions, and that on

the whole they are getting on, in the way towards heaven. But it is not so; it cannot be so indeed. Our sins and wickedness really do hinder us. Any one of them, if willfully indulged; is enough to stop us altogether, and even those which come upon us by surprise, those which we are ashamed of and strive against, are all in their measure sore lets and hindrances to us; and the further men get on in the way of goodness, so much the more do they feel this, so much the more do they grieve even for their lesser and more pardonable sins.

Good and sincere people know this very well. But even the ordinary sort may know it, if they will. I will try and put it before you by a plain example. Suppose one should go to any person who is leading an irregular indevout life; irregular, I mean, in his duties towards God, making no point of going to Church, and quite neglecting Holy Communion. If one should go to such a man, and ask him about himself, he might perhaps begin to answer about his distance from Church, his worldly troubles, his much business, or the like. But, in the end, it would be sure to come out, that it is some sin which is hindering him: he is often provoked to anger, or tempted to take dishonest or unclean liberties, or at any rate his worldly cares haunt and trouble him; he cares too much for this world, to say his prayers in earnest to God; and for these causes he cannot serve God aright. The waiting on Church and Communion are the race set before him, but these sins and wickednesses hinder him from running it. Thus you see, the collect speaks the truth, when it lays the chief part of the blame of each man's imperfection on

himself. It is not outward things, but our own unmortified desires, which let and hinder us from running our Christian race. We are not so good as we ought to be, because we do not earnestly desire to be so. If we would open our hearts to the good thoughts, which Almighty God from time to time puts into them: if we would let those drops of heavenly dew sink deep; if we would refresh and renew them by prayer; the difference would very soon appear in our conduct. The evil is great; but how thankful ought we to be, that the remedy is, by God's mercy, in our own hands. Why should not each one of us, this very evening, begin to apply that remedy? What should hinder us, first of all, from joining with all our hearts in the collect which will presently be offered up, in which we are to beseech God that, in consideration of His Son's being born among us and of our being new born into Him, He would daily renew us with His Holy Spirit? If we ask Him heartily so to raise up His power, and come among us and with great might succour us, without all doubt He will do so. Of all evenings in the year, this Christmas Eve is not the one, in which our good Lord will turn away from the prayer of any poor penitent, or of any one who but desires to be a penitent. The Angels, we know, came down on Christmas night, to rejoice with us, and teach us to rejoice at the wonderful Incarnation and Birth of our Divine Saviour; and we trust that they are not far from the hymns and carols of good Christian people, indoors, and out of doors, even on this very night. Now they are the same Angels, of whom the Truth has told us, "There is joy in their presence"

and among them, "over one sinner that repenteth." If then in any house, where the Christmas bells or Christmas carols are heard to-night, there be any person, who is in earnest grieved and wearied with the burthen of his sins, whatever those sins have been: let such an one look up and lift up his head, when he hears the joyful sound, let him take it as a sure token that the Lord is even now raising up His power, and coming to him, in His great and loving might, to succour him against those sins, which he now feels to have so sadly hindered him in running the race which was set before him. Let him make sure that the blessed Angels, who are even now keeping Christmas with us, are rejoicing in these his devout fears and misgivings: and not the Angels only, but the God of the Angels, the Blessed Babe Himself, Who this night laid Himself for us all in the lowly manger. As surely as He was conceived at Nazareth and born at Bethlehem, so surely will He help and deliver us, and that speedily, if we do but go on sincerely desiring and striving and praying to be delivered from our sins. He will help each one of us, and He will help His whole Church, now of a long time divided and distressed for no other reason, but that Christians will not be good.

With thoughts like these, let us go home, examine ourselves, say our prayers, and lie down on our beds; and when we awake on Christmas morning, let us endeavour to go back to these same good thoughts: and so on morning by morning. He will speedily help and deliver us: to us it may seem slowly, but by and by all our trials will seem to have lasted but the twinkling of an eye, if once, by His inconceivable mercy, we may be admitted to His Eternal Joy.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE BRINGING DOWN AND THE LIFTING UP OF THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT.

ISA. ii. 11.

“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”

ALL who read Scripture with the least attention must have observed how much is said in it of this meaning: that those who are now high and exalted among men shall one day be brought low, and those who are low and humble shall be exalted. It is even mentioned as the great sign of the coming of Christ, the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven. “^aThe voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.” And in the Psalms, “^bThou wilt save the afflicted people, but wilt bring down high looks.” And in Isaiah again, “^cThe mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: but the Lord of Hosts shall be ex-

^a Isa. xl. 3.

^b Ps. xviii. 27. P. B.

^c Isa. v. 15-17.

alted in judgement, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed after their manner." Accordingly, when our Saviour came, it was a kind of proverbial saying with Him. "^dHe that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased." We find Him in the Gospels using it three several times to reprove the pride of the Pharisees, and to encourage those who came, humbly believing on Him. And it is the very burthen of that divine hymn of His Mother; "He hath regarded the lowliness of His hand-maiden. He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats: and hath exalted the humble and meek."

But it is very much to be observed, that these sayings are, properly speaking, prophetic. They tell us indeed what is always God's will and decree, at one time as well as another, but they lead our minds on to a time, when that Will shall be more entirely realized, than it ever yet has been on earth. That time is the Great Day of Judgement. Then, what God is now *doing* will be *done*, ended, and perfected for ever. Now, we perceive by faith that so it will be. We read or hear of the great things which God has done from time to time, in resisting the proud and in giving grace to the humble; but then we and all the world shall see it with our own eyes. Therefore says our Lord; "He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Not "is," but "shall be;" we see not yet all things put under the humble and meek;

^d S. Luke xiv. 11.

but we shall see it, if we be worthy hereafter. And in the prophecy of the text; "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." The Day which we are here to think of, what day is it, but the Great Day of the Lord, when all the glories and beauties of this world, which are here mentioned one by one, shall come to an end for ever? For thus the prophet goes on; "The day of the Lord shall be upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up; and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures." See here, enumerated one by one, all the most beautiful and glorious objects of this world, the works whether of nature or of art, which most win the admiration of men. We may admire them, but we are warned here to recollect that they will be but for a short time. The Day of the Lord will be upon them all. They, and the world which contains them, will all burn around us, and under our feet. "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." The words are repeated, the more to sink them deep in our minds.

Let us then consider the last Day, the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgement, in this especial point of view : as a time when all that is high and proud in this world will be brought low ; all that men naturally exalt and value themselves upon ; and the Lord alone shall be exalted. He, the Being of all beings, by Whom they are, and in Whom they consist, the Holy, Blessed, and Glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Three Persons in One God—He only, and His creatures, in such measure as they partake of Him, and are one with Him, and He with them—He only shall be lifted up, and glorified and exalted.

Then will be fulfilled, once and for ever, all the sayings and prophecies of our Lord and His Apostles, concerning the exaltation of the lowly and the humiliation of the high and lofty ones. Recollect one by one, what are the things which we naturally most admire in this world, and see if they will not one and all come to an end on that day. The prophet numbers them up as follows. First, “all cedars of Lebanon which are high and lifted up;” that is, the great and high-born persons, to whom God has given a place in the world above others. And again, “the oaks of Bashan ;” they who are of consequence because of their property and substance ; the rich who live peaceably in their habitations, and seem to have everything their own way. Both sorts will on that day see an entire end of their earthly and temporal advantages ; as surely as the cedars and oaks, how tall and strong soever, will be consumed in the outward and visible fire which will burn up the whole earth.

Next he mentions, "the high mountains and the hills that are lifted up." There is not in this visible world perhaps a more noble and engaging sight than a land of high, steep, rough mountains, with the lights and shadows from the clouds upon it, with its streams, rocks, woods and deep valleys. But all this shew of visible glories will of course end, when the world and all things that are therein shall be burned up: and so will the kingdoms, and empires, the companies and cities of men, to which in Scripture these mountains are compared. One only mountain, kingdom or city, will endure: the Church, the mountain of the Lord's house, the kingdom of heaven, the city of the living God, *that* will endure when all the rest perish, because it is not of this world; but Babylon, Nineveh, Tyre, Rome, England, all the great powers upon which at various times so many men have prided themselves, and in which they have trusted, will come utterly to an end for evermore. They will perish as though they had never been. And where then will be the wise politicians, and valiant warriors, the knowing counsellors, and powerful speakers, the mighty and the crafty ones, whom all looked up to, because they were so high and great in those earthly kingdoms? They will come to an end, even as the cities which they depended on; and the saints of the Most High, the poor and despised of the earth, will take the kingdom, and reign for ever and ever.

In the next sentence the prophet passes from the creations of God to those of man: from the trees and mountains to "high towers and fenced walls," to "the ships of Tarshish, and to pleasant pictures:" i. e.

to all those works, and contrivances, which we most admire when they belong to others, and on which, being our own, we are most tempted to rely. He speaks of high towers and fenced walls: and we know what a snare they have been to men ever since the building of Babel. He makes mention of the "ships of Tarshish:" and we in this country, proud as we are of our shipping, are but too well able to understand, how the skill, wealth and power, which goes along with such pursuits, may withdraw the heart and soul from God. He speaks of "pleasant pictures," inventions of art and beauty, which are apt to win and take captive the whole souls of those who have really an eye for them, and of course are dangerous, as all worldly things are, in proportion to the love we are tempted to have for them. All these things the prophet speaks of, to warn us that the Day of the Lord of hosts is fast coming upon them; that Day which will put an end to them all. The glorious mountains will sink down and crumble away, the forts and towers will be shivered, and even their ruins disappear; the ships with their wealth and skill, the pictures with their beauty, will be utterly destroyed by fire; and where then shall we be, what will become of us, if we have set our hearts on any of these things, trusted in them, and made them our happiness?

It might be well, perhaps, if we encouraged such thoughts as these, at times when we are most tempted, looking around us, to be led astray by what we see. Nebuchadnezzar, we read, walking in his palace in Babylon, was guilty of such sinful boasting. "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for

the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" And sore and heavy was the punishment. Many a man is guilty, on a smaller scale, of the same kind of sin as Nebuchadnezzar, boastfully admiring his own works, and permitting his own heart to be satisfied with them: and heavy is the sentence to be expected by such either here or in the other world; but they may prevent it. Nebuchadnezzar himself might have prevented it, and very likely would have done so, had he known what we all know of the Day of Judgement. He might have said to his own soul, "Why so elate, why so carried away with a work like this? Pass a few years and it will be all burned up; it will vanish and be lost altogether, as if it had never been." How should one be proud and self-satisfied with such an expectation? Or, how again should a man look with envious eyes upon the dwelling or estate of his neighbour, far wealthier than his own? Before many years are past, both shall alike endure the fire: and we shall all of us then understand and receive, what seems now so very hard a lesson, how foolish it was to be greatly concerned about such things. It is as if there were a fire raging in the place, and the poorer sort were to stand by and envy the richer, or the richer to be proud and despise the poorer, because they had more to be consumed. Would you not think it very simple, did you hear one of your neighbours rejoicing, that he had heaped up such and such stores just in time for the flame to lay hold of them, and another bewailing himself and very discontented, because he had not as much as the

first, but only a small cottage and some needful furniture to be consumed? Yet if we had faith "as a grain of mustard seed," we should see and feel that this is just our own case, as often as we are disquieted at another's being richer, better off in the world than we are; or again, proud and self-satisfied at finding ourselves wealthier than they.

But let us look also on the other side of the subject, and consider not only how the high will be brought low, but also how the poor and lowly (if they were also poor and lowly in heart) will be exalted in that Day. I say, if they be poor and lowly in heart. For this there is great need to remember; since unhappily too many, when these things are brought to their mind, are tempted to trust to their poverty alone: as if misery in this world were almost a sure passport to happiness in the next. They abuse the promises made to Christ's poor, as if they were made simply to the poor. It is far from being so. The poor whom He blesses are the "poor in heart," the contented and thankful, those who, if He pleases, had rather give up all in this world, in order that they may have more in the next. These are they to whom His favour is promised, not the grumbling, discontented, unquiet ones, who were poor only because they could not help it, and went down to their graves murmuring, and wishing to be rich.

The great pattern and example of God's favour to the poor, towards which all eyes and hearts will be drawn, will be the appearance of the lowly Son of Mary, of Him Who had not where to lay His Head, the rejected, the mocked, the scourged and crucified One, upon His Throne of Glory, judging

the world. Our very eyes, willing or unwilling, will then see Jesus, Who "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." We shall see "all things put under Him," Who was a "very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people." And together with Him we shall see His saints crowned and glorious. There will be His blessed Virgin Mother, here on earth one of the lowliest, and poorest, who was fain to lie in in a stable because she could not pay for room in the inn :—her we shall behold acknowledged by all the world as the Mother of God, highly-favoured, most blessed among women. And following her, and very blessed in doing so, will be thousands of holy virgins, whom the world either knew not or despised. There will be the fishermen and publicans, and tentmakers, and other poor and despised sort of persons, who being chosen by Him, joyfully met His choice. The world had cast them out, and they were "as the filth of all things," but in that Day, "they shall sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." There will be a great multitude of poor persons, such as Lazarus in the parable, who lived and died unknown among men, slighted, perhaps ill-used, by those who were most bound to help them; but because they had faith and patience and obedience, Christ will own them in that day as His own members, His own poor. He will give them each a royal crown and robe, and angels openly to wait on them, and guard them. He will take them up with Him; even their very bodies, so full here of suffering and discomfort, He will take up with Him into the highest heaven. For so He promises ex-

pressly by His Apostle. “ ‘The dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain,” such Christians as shall happen to be then living on earth, “shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air ; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Some of those who shall be then found alive will be lying, no doubt, on a sick bed, and otherwise in a very low and destitute condition. Think, what a sudden, what an unspeakable change for them ! To be caught up in a moment from their painful and weary couches, from their poor, mean, scanty provision, and established for ever and ever, not in ease only, and quiet rest (which to sufferers here seems almost like a sort of heaven) but in heaven itself, in Christ’s blissful everlasting presence. And this might happen at any moment. For the Day of the Lord is altogether uncertain. It might happen to any of those who are sick and suffering among us. Christ might come, and take them to Himself in an instant. What a thought is here, to make us tender, and respectful, I may say religious, in our attendance upon them ! How can we ever think enough of the duty and honour of waiting on those, who may so soon, for ought we know, be reigning with Christ in heaven ? Or how can we help fearing, lest our Master, coming in suddenly, should find us leaving them uncared for, or still worse, dealing hardly and unkindly with them ?

But it is not the sick and suffering only, whom we are taught to reverence by these thoughts of the Day of Judgement, but all persons whatever, who in any sense are in a low and humble estate ; the weak

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

in mind and body, the forlorn and friendless, widows and orphans, the timid, the doubtful, the ignorant. All these, being in a low condition, are to be honoured by us as partakers of the promise of Christ. We must deal with them reverentially and tenderly; we must watch to do them good; for these are they whom He invites to Him, and whom He delights to comfort and to honour.

By the same rule we should, on the other hand, be very full of care and fear for ourselves, in such measure as we seem to be of the contrary sort to these poor and little ones. If it comes into our minds at any time, "Now we are full, now we are rich, now we have our own way, now every one looks up to us, now we know how to manage; we are free to do as we please:" let us presently check such thoughts with the awful, and most true thought, "The Last Day will soon be here; then where will be all these helps and advantages, on which we are now tempted to rely? Behold the Judge is before the door. He is even now sitting on His Throne: the vail will presently be drawn aside, and shew Him to us in His glorious Majesty. What if He should find us with proud looks, and scornful hearts?"

SERMON XXIX.

THE WINNOWING AND THE BURNING.

S. MATT. iii. 12.

“ Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner ; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

ON the first Sunday in Advent this year we considered our Lord's second Coming, how we are sure before long to die, and we can die but once, and after death all is judgement. On the second Sunday, we heard Christ's warning, how, when He comes, it will be like lightning : suddenly, at an instant, seen everywhere at once : thrilling through all, to their eternal joy or horror. Now we are to consider the immediate effect of His coming, that it will be like winnowing. So it had been foretold, more than once by the Prophets. The Lord speaks by Isaiah to His Church, and says, “^a Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth : thou shalt thresh the mountains,” i. e. all nations, “and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them.” And in the Psalms,

^a Isa. xli. 15, 16.

the ungodly are not like the good tree which abides, and is fruitful, "^b but they are like the chaff, which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth." And in Daniel: the ungodly powers of the world, "^c the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold are broken in pieces together, and become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors, and the wind carries them away, that no place is found for them." And in Hosea, the wicked among God's people are "^d as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor."

Thus we see that in Holy Scripture God's dealings with His people being compared altogether to a farmer's way of managing his field; the process of judgement, and especially the Last Judgement, is compared to what we call "winnowing." Let us consider this particularly.

We all know what winnowing is for; it comes after the threshing, to separate the wheat from the chaff. In those Eastern countries, and in the times in which our Lord was here, the work of winnowing was not done as now, by a sort of machine, but simply by tossing the heap of mingled corn and chaff in a strong wind, with broad shovels, or fans contrived for that purpose. The lighter part, the chaff, was of course all blown away; the heavier, the corn, fell back on the threshing-floor, and was in a condition to be carefully gathered, and stored away for grinding or for seed, or however it might be wanted.

When therefore it is said in the text, that our Lord will come with His fan in His Hand, we readily understand that this means His coming to be our Judge:

^b Ps. i. 4.

^c Dan. ii. 35.

^d Hosea xiii. 3.

The fan is the token of judgement, i.e. of separation between the chaff and the wheat; the precious and the vile; the good and the bad. And when S. John the Baptist said to the Jews, "One cometh after me, Who is mightier than I, Whose fan is in His Hand;" this would be to them a whole parable in one word. They would have before their mind's eye a picture of a threshing-floor in a high place, where the strong winds would come with power, and on the floor a great heap of chaff and good corn mixed, and a strong labourer coming up with a fan, or winnowing shovel in his hand, and throwing up into the air first one shovel-full and then another, until he had thrown up the whole heap; and so the wind with its strong draught would blow away the light chaff, while the heavy wheat would fall to the ground, and lie clean, and unmingled, on the threshing-floor, ready to be swept up, and carried into the granary.

It was not hard for the Jews, neither is it hard for us, to understand that in this parable the threshing-floor means the Church, Christ's appointed place for trying, and training His people, and preparing them for the great things which are to come: that the wheat means the sound members of Christ, Who Himself taught us that He is like a corn of wheat, which being cast into the ground, dies and brings forth much fruit, even as Christ, dying and rising, was as it were good seed in the earth, and all good Christians, true members of Christ, are so many corns growing from that seed: the chaff, on the other hand, means the unsound and worthless, who, having been members of Christ, are now nearly or quite separated from Him. For the present the chaff lies in a heap along with the

wheat, and the starved, miserable, stunted grains of wheat lie in a heap with the ripe sound healthy ones. That is, here in this life the weak unstable untrue Christians, those who have no good principles, no real root in themselves, who are builded not on the rock but on the sand, are mingled with the other sort, so that the eye of man, looking on, sometimes can hardly discern which is which. For instance, we come here into Church, we see a number of persons sitting together. All come to the same service, and, by so coming, openly profess that they know they have souls, and desire to save them; outwardly perhaps, they are all tolerably decent, both in appearance and in behaviour. Well, this is like the heap in the threshing-floor, partly wheat and partly chaff. For the present all are alike, all are in one: but wait a while, and the wind will arise, and the labourer with the fan will throw up the wheat and the chaff together against the wind, and the one will be blown to a distance, the other will fall safe on to the floor again; and this being done over and over again, the floor will be thoroughly purged; the chaff and the light useless corns will be all blown, or swept, clean away, and the sound heavy wheat alone will remain. So will it be with this congregation of ours, and with every other assembly of Christian persons. Now, as I said, they are like wheat and chaff mixed; but by and by the wind will arise; the wind of persecution, tribulation, or other trial, and will quickly part the one from the other. For suppose persecution to come on. Suppose, for instance, what has happened before now in this, and other countries, that a law was passed to punish any one who ever came here to Church; to

make them pay a fine, or send them to prison. We all know that this would be a severe trial ; we should be every one of us greatly tempted to give up doing our duty to God and His Church, and too many, I fear, would obey the wicked law, and cast off their allegiance to their Saviour, on one pretence or another, rather than pay the fine or suffer the imprisonment. Such persons then would prove like the chaff: the wind would blow them away, because they have no weight, no solidity, no substance in them : while the few that remained steady, and suffered rather than leave off their prayers, would shew themselves good and sound wheat. So it was, when Nebuchadnezzar made that famous decree of his. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the three holy children, Daniel's friends, were as corns of genuine wheat ; the wind of the king's threatenings could not carry them away : but all the rest fell down and worshipped the golden image, for fear of the burning fiery furnace. They were as chaff, or at least as light grains no better than chaff. When you read then, or hear, of people persecuted for doing their duty, and still more, if you find yourself at all likely to be tried in that way, be not too much dismayed, but think you see the Great Lord of the harvest standing by with His fan in His Hand, and make sure that, if you are sincere, He will not expose you to any such strong wind as He knows you are not able to bear. Make sure that neither on yourself, nor on others whom you love, will any such dangerous blast of trouble or persecution ever blow, but what you may stand against it by His grace, if you duly seek to Him.

I have put the case of persecution : but any other

trouble or temptation in its degree answers the same providential purpose of separating the chaff from the wheat. Perhaps, if you are steady in serving God, some person whom you love may frown at you. Perhaps you are a good way from any Church, and it is harder work than usual for you to come regularly to prayers and sacraments. Perhaps you have a large family, and are tempted to take liberties in business, or to make free with what is not yours, or to run dishonestly into debt, to supply the present wants of that family. All these temptations are as winds, and no doubt they are often very strong winds, blowing upon you, to try if you are wheat or chaff. One man gives way to them, another stands firm. The one proves himself, so far, good corn, the other mere husks and refuse. Still the separation is not yet complete, nor in general is it public. The All-seeing Eye alone exactly beholds, which of us thoroughly resist the wind of temptation, and which yield to it secretly, or openly. But there is a great day coming, when the floor will be thoroughly purged. These winnowings of one or two at a time are but rehearsals, in a very small way, of the great separation which will come suddenly, and in sight of all, upon the whole heap at once. Nearly two thousand years ago, the holy Baptist warned God's people, how that awful moment was near at hand. He warned them that the Almighty Judge, the Discerner and Searcher of all, was already amongst them, and they were not aware of it. "There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not, His fan is in His hand: He is ready to purge His floor: even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees." Two thousand years ago, or nearly so,

these warnings were given ; and surely they are not less but more awful, as the time draws near. To us, even more than to them (because we are Christians, and they were but Jews), to us even more than to them it is said, "There standeth One among you Whom ye know not," or if ye know, yet too many of you alas ! think very little of Him. Yet He is close to you : He is here in this Church, in every Church, in every place where Christians are. He is close to you with His fan in His Hand, i. e. with all ready for judgement, awaiting only the hour which Himself has ordained. When that hour strikes, that last hour, the end of time, then He will thoroughly purge His floor : He will do it thoroughly, will make clean work of it. Here, when by persecutions or other trials He separates His true from His false servants, He does it according to the course of His kingdom here, more or less imperfectly. Much chaff still remains mingled with the wheat : many hypocrites worship by the side of the faithful. But in that day it will not be so. That last dreadful winnowing will leave no speck of chaff in the threshing-floor, no not so much as a mote of small dust : nor will it suffer any one, the smallest real corn, to be blown away. He will gather the wheat into His garner : *all* of it : not one grain shall be wasted. O comfortable word for the lowly and feeble and ignorant, who seem to themselves to know nothing, to do nothing at all for Christ. He will take care of you, be quite sure. There is, in His garner, room enough for every one of you. For the poorest and simplest, who had least of what men call learning, if he do but give himself earnestly to his Saviour, to do and suffer what He would have him, a place is provided

above the stars of heaven, no less certainly than for the Apostles, or the Blessed Virgin Mother herself. Fear not. You are all known to Him by name. Only come to Him seriously in faith, and you will hear Him call your names over from His glorious Throne, and He will store you up with the best of His wheat in the garner.

“But the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” It will not only be driven away, but burned. The breath of the Lord, which will separate the good corn from the refuse, will prove like a stream of brimstone, to kindle a fire on what it drives away. And, once kindled, that fire will never go out. Scripture calls it everlasting, unquenchable, and says plainly, that “^ethe smoke of those who are tormented in it goeth up for ever and ever.” O fearful to think of, what some of us may know but too certainly, that we should ourselves have ever been scorched with the flame of that fire: should wilfully have gone near, and so trifled with it, that, had we died as we then were, it must have been our portion for ever. And yet this is the case with each one of us, who has wilfully cast himself into deadly sin, or knowingly continued in it. And, O yet more fearful and distressing, should any of us even now be in that same condition, secretly or openly going on in any of the things of which it is said, they that practise them shall not inherit the kingdom! Such persons have already, in a manner, the fire of hell kindled upon them, and they know it not. They go about perhaps gaily among men: but what, if in the sight of God and His Angels they should even now seem to be wrapped in those horrible flames?

Fire unquenchable ! everlasting burnings ! Can we hear of it, and not be moved ? Shall God Himself draw near, God our Saviour, to tell us of it, and shall we not even begin examining ourselves, whether it have kindled upon us or no ? For if we be in any of those deadly sins, be sure it *has* kindled upon us, though as yet, blessed be God, it may be quenched by the waters of repentance and the blood of the Cross. The Lord of the harvest stands by with His fan in His hand, and tells us what He will do with the wheat, and what with the chaff ; and shall we not even consider whether we ourselves are not chaff rather than wheat ?

What is chaff ? It is a light worthless thing, easily blown about by every wind : it has no life, no power, no substance in it. Would that we had not, very many of us, too great cause to fear, that our religion, during great part of our lives, has been no more real than this : nay, would we could be quite sure, that it is not so with us at present ! Think of the continued childishness, in which so many go on, and are not ashamed, during all their young years : scarcely professing to mind anything but the diversion of the moment. If they are not in gross deadly sin, no thanks to their own good resolutions, for they never made seriously any resolutions at all. They never once thought of seriously giving themselves up, soul and body, to serve God with all their might. All day long He has been spreading out His Hands, His pierced Hands to them ; and what have they done ? They have now and then felt good thoughts, but they have never had the spirit, the courage, the gratitude, to consider seriously how deep their debt is to Him : they have never loved their Saviour enough to wish

in earnest to pay Him the best service they can. Surely they are chaff, and not wheat: surely the least wind will blow them away: much more the breath of the Lord in the dreadful Day of Judgement.

And what shall we say to those who, from time to time, have formed in their hearts good and holy purposes; good and holy, if they had but been kept; and from time to time, alas! have broken them all: so that while they seemed to themselves always intending to grow better, they have been always relapsing into the same faults, or worse. Surely these also are chaff: they cannot be good corn: there can be nothing in them to please the watchful husbandman. They are chaff; else they would not so lightly swerve from what they had promised themselves to do: they would not break through a good custom, such as going a long distance to Church and Communion, merely because it gave them trouble: they would not let troublesome or plausible talkers persuade them out of ways which they know to be right, even if they cannot explain how: above all, they would be strong against positive temptations to known sin.

These, my brethren, are the sort of marks, whereby the Lord of the harvest will try us, when He sets about purging His floor: by these therefore let us try ourselves now: now during this very week, during the little time yet remaining of Advent. For why should the Judge come, and after so many warnings find us at last unprepared? Why should Christmas come and go, and leave us as little in earnest, as heartless and unthankful as ever to our loving Saviour? Why should new years, one after another, arise on us, and we still continue like chaff, light, useless, unsteady, and fit only to be burned at last?

SERMON XXX.

THE SOUL'S WELCOME OF CHRIST A TEST OF ITS SPIRITUAL CONDITION.

S. LUKE xxi. 28.

“ When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh.”

WE heard in the beginning of to day's Gospel, what sort of signs and tokens they are, which, when they begin to come to pass, are to fill the minds of Christ's people with hope and joyful expectation. “ There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.” What sort of signs ? Will they shine more brightly than usual ? Will they shew more glorious and beautiful ? Nay, but “ the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” “ And upon the earth” shall be “ distress of nations, with perplexity: the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” Such signs, the Truth Himself tells us, we must expect in the last age, when judgement is now nigh at hand : and how are we His people to

receive them ? Prostrate before Him in sackcloth and ashes ? Entering into the rocks, and hiding us in the dust ? Nay, says our Lord ; but, " When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." The most frightful changes in the earth, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes ; and in the heavens the darkening of the sun's light, the blotting out of stars ; and in the hearts and hopes of men, universal fear, distress, and perplexity, are to be occasions of joy and hope to Christians. Consider this well, my brethren. Does it not follow that we are somehow very much changed, and fallen away from what Christians ought to be ? For which of us could bear so much as to imagine the presence of these awful judgements, which the saints are invited to regard with joy ? At this moment, how many are shrinking from the thought of famine, as a thing only possible. I do not blame them or myself for it : no saint, but would do the same : but then the saint, along with his natural horror, would feel a consolation in the thought, that all such things are the appointed tokens of our Lord's being near at hand. But we, unthinking, if not unbelieving, we feel *nothing but* the dread and horror of such times. We do not look beyond them with steady faith ; we are not used to contemplate the glory behind the cloud ; our eyes but rest on the cloud itself alone.

And it is the same in regard of the more ordinary evils of life. Ordinary Christians not only cannot well bear the overthrow of health, or the loss of worldly substance, but it absolutely strikes them down, it lays them prostrate : they feel as if all was

over with them. Yet some of us have seen, and all have read or heard, how there have been persons who "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods," and others who have welcomed pain and sickness, as the very things that were best for them. There have been sick penitents who have said to their friends, "Do not pray that my pains may be less, but pray that my senses may be spared, that I may repent more thoroughly." Some have cried out, in their deep sense of sin, "I would not part with one throb of my agony for the world." And we know how the blessed Apostles, how the martyrs and Christian sufferers of those first and best times, had overcome their natural desires and regrets: how they hated father and mother, brethren and sisters, wife and children, yea and their own lives also, that they might become Christ's disciples. We know how such as S. Paul, being once made sensible of the voice from heaven, gave up all their old prejudices, their old belief, and that of their fathers. "What things were gain to them, those they counted loss for Christ." For Him they willingly and gladly parted with all that they had dearest in this world, and with the kind of hopes for the next, that they had been all their lives long instructed and accustomed to dwell upon. When we think of them, we can more understand, how those who shall be like them, saintly and obedient Christians, in the last days, shall lift up their heads with joy, rejoicing in their Saviour's tokens, how terrible soever.

But, "all the tribes of the earth," says our Lord, "shall mourn." Men of the world, earthly-minded

^a Phil. iii. 7.

persons, all whose hearts are set upon perishable things, they will of course be cast down and humbled in despair and anguish, when they see the desire of their hearts, the delight of their souls, the only blessings which they can understand or care for, taken away from them, and perishing for ever. Those who mind only their houses and farms, their treasures and goods, of course it will be heart-breaking to them, when they see the last dreadful fire beginning to lay hold of those very things, and burn them up without mercy. Those who are altogether given to pleasures and diversions, how can they choose but be smitten to the heart, when that trumpet shall sound, which shall put an end to all such things for ever, and call them away into a world, where will be no pleasure except for those who have learned here to love God and His saints. Those who think only of ease and comfort and of going on quietly from day to day, what thoughts and feelings will they have, when all things are being dissolved ; when there shall be no more home, no quiet fireside or comfortable resting-place here, but the last fearful journey, the end of which they know must be Heaven or Hell, must be undertaken at a moment's notice, and they unprepared for it? Alas, my brethren, we can but too well understand, how and why the tribes of the earth should mourn, when the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in Heaven. But let not the thought pass away from us, let us say to ourselves very seriously, "Here is the voice of Christ sounding in mine ears, not only to warn me of His dreadful coming, but to provide me also with a rule and measure whereby to judge how I am prepared for it. Would it be a joy, or

a grief to me, were it even now to happen? Should I be wakened out of my sleep this very night suddenly, by the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God, by the overpowering brightness of the sign of Christ in heaven; should I presently begin to mourn with the tribes of the earth, or should I, with the holy Apostles and the rest to whom our Lord was speaking, be enabled to "look up, and lift up my head," as knowing that my redemption was drawing nigh?

Now when I say, the answer to such a question as this, may be a rule and measure for a man, how he is himself prepared for death and judgement, I perceive that I am saying a thing which may cause pain and sadness to some whom God would not have saddened: and therefore I beseech you earnestly to attend to the differences which I am going to point out. The question is not, whether one should be alarmed, or no, at the sudden Coming of our Lord? It may be, that the holiest and best, who shall be then alive, will be most deeply moved with the remembrance of their own sins and infirmities. But the question is, were that Day now at hand, should we sorrow as men without hope, at the final departure of the good things of this world? Well may we tremble to appear before our Judge! But if we be at all such as He would have us, our trembling and amazement will be tempered with a comfortable sense of His fatherly care over us, and a hope that He will be merciful to us, and that we have not quite forfeited our interest in Him. On the other hand, if we have permitted our hearts and members to go astray from Him, and have not returned by due and timely repentance, our fear in that Day will be not like the fear of sons: it will be a

desperate horror, as of persons made aware that their last stake has failed them, and they have no chance of happiness or relief for ever. This then is the question, I could wish to ask of my own conscience, and of all your consciences, my brethren. If the cry were now made "The Bridegroom cometh," no doubt we feel that we should go forth to meet Him in fear. But in what sort of fear? The fear which a penitent child might have of an offended father, or the mere selfish fear of punishment, such as the worst of men may feel, when he is found out, and the sentence of the law is taking hold of him? Is it a miserable, slavish fear, or a contrite fear, a fear mingled with love? You will say, "How am I to know?" I will try and tell you some signs of the right sort of fear of the Last Day. It is such a fear as causes a person not to turn away his mind altogether from the thought of that Day, but rather to prepare himself for it without loss of time. Suppose a set of servants, in their master's absence, going on badly; of course they would be filled with fear, when anything happened to make them feel that he might look in upon them, at any moment. It would be a good and useful fear, if it caused them to turn their minds in earnest towards amending their ways: if it stirred up the indolent to set about his work, if it quieted the noisy and unruly, if it restrained the dissolute and daring from improper liberties. But, if the same servants, when the fear came across them, should presently try to drive it away by plunging deeper in excess of riot, or if those who could not quite rid themselves of it, should yet care so much for the ridicule of the rest, or be so enslaved by their own old bad habits, as still to go on in

the courses which they knew would most grieve and provoke their master; then every one would say, their fear was not worth much; it was altogether of the wrong sort, and would not save them from a heavy reckoning at last. For what sort of an excuse would that be, when the master of the house came home, for the servant to go and say to him, "It is true, I neglected your work; I disobeyed your commands, I kept bad company; I wasted your goods; I did such and such wrong things; but I feared all the time you would be angry when you came to know it?" Would not the master say at once to such an one, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee; thou fearedst mine anger: why then didst thou go on offending me?" And who would say, such a servant was hardly dealt with, if he were driven from his master's house for good and all?

By this then we may judge ourselves, my brethren, concerning our own fear of the Coming of Christ, or of our own latter end. If it cause us to break off our iniquities, to do right things, and leave wrong things undone, it is a wholesome and godly fear, and the longer, and more diligently we obey its motions, the more may we thank God and take courage. A man, we will suppose, is in grievous sin before God: he is a thief, and has put his hand to his neighbour's goods; or he is unclean, having given himself up to the indulgence of some unlawful lust; or he is slothful and irreligious, neglecting his prayers, not coming to God's solemn worship. He comes here, and hears something in a lesson, or in a sermon, about the hour of death or the day of judgement, which strikes him, makes him uneasy, will not let him rest. Or he takes

up a book, and lights upon words which Providence seems to have thrown on purpose in his way, words which seem to him to speak of, and to mean his very self, and no other person. Or some fearful change or chance happens in his own home, or closely within his knowledge, which is to him as the finger of God : he cannot doubt the purpose, and meaning of it. He is frightened for the time ; he mourns to think of the Son of Man coming, and finding him as he is. Is it a good and wholesome fear or no ? Wait a little and we shall see ; I cannot tell you just yet : but I will tell you by and by, when I know for certain whether or no he is leaving off his sin. Only I am sure that in such measure as he really leaves it off, and desires the blessing of God on his endeavours, in such measure his fear of the Last Day will cease to be a slavish fear, and will be mingled more and more with a dutiful love of God, as being still his Father, though wronged and displeased ; and as still holding out the sweet hope of pardon and acceptance, through His Son Jesus Christ.

But alas ! it is too plain that the generality of people calling themselves Christians do indeed fear death and judgement, when those awful realities are any how brought before their minds, but with no good and holy fear, else there would be better and more abundant fruits of penitence. Men do not so much fear God, they do not so much shrink from the thought of what their sins may bring them to hereafter ; but they are uneasy at recollecting, that whether they will or no, they must part with this present world. Their way of going on shews too clearly, what it is which causes them so to hate the

remembrance of the end. There will be no more then, of the pursuits and pleasures on which they have set their hearts. No more feastings then ; no more sports and games ; no more dress and show ; no more managing and money-getting ; no more marrying and giving in marriage ; no more buying, selling, trading, planting and building. No more living upon vain shows and false pretences ; no plausible, comfortable ways of hiding our faults from ourselves and from one another, and so flattering ourselves that God will overlook them too : but all that is unreal will vanish away, all that is untrue will be exposed and brought to light. No wonder that we shrink from this, we who have contented ourselves with shadows, and delight to have it so. No wonder that the unfaithful servant hides his eyes from his master's coming : no wonder if the negligent scholar had rather not see the face of his teacher. “^b Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For he that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.” Therefore solemn thoughts are a trouble to us, therefore we draw back from holy things, therefore we are so glad of any excitement of business or diversion, which may fill our minds for the time, and drive the true and eternal things out of them. “^c And what will ye do in the end thereof?” Which way will ye look in that Day, when all around will be the earth, which you have idolized, burning ; underneath the bottomless pit, for which you will have prepared yourselves, opening ; above, the sign of the Son of Man, the Cross, which you have slighted, appearing in Heaven ?

^b S. John iii. 19, 20.^c Jer. v. 31.

But, you mean to change some day : you do not intend to go on always in your present unsatisfactory way. You know that you are now in a dangerous dream ; but you fully purpose to awake and rouse yourselves up. So some of you speak and think : but let me ask you one question. How can you contentedly go on at all in a way which you know you must get out of, or else be ruined ? You say, you mean and hope to alter your conduct some day. Consider for a moment, what this saying means. It means that you feel that you are at this moment on the broad way that leadeth to destruction. It means that, if you were now to die, you know you would die in deadly sin, and so you must be lost for ever. It means that the Devil has even now hold of you ; that you feel him, as it were, grasping your arm, and guiding and urging you on, gradually, but surely, from one deep of sin to another ; and yet you are not minded as yet to break altogether from his hold ; you mean to do so when you come to such a point, but for the present you will keep company with him. O, little do you know of his power and craft and malice, who talk so lightly of parting with him when you will. At present you have the power to do so ; that is, if you will pray and strive, God will give you power. But a time will soon come, when prayer and striving will be impossible. You are like a person going fast down a hill which grows steeper and steeper : for a time, you feel that you have power to stop yourself ; but if you go on at your present rate, you will come to a place, where you must go on or fall headlong, whether you wish it yourself or no. O stay your downward, your ruinous course at once. Do not say,

"I will go on just so much further:" very likely when you come there, you will find it far steeper than it looks at a distance, far more difficult to stop.

Consider this too, that the farther you go down, the more steps you will have to climb and toil up afterwards, even if your Redeemer, by a sort of miracle of His grace, should interfere to stay you from entirely falling. The more and the longer you sin, the harder to repent. *Now* is the time ; *now* God calls you : *now* you have the offer of His grace. Say not, "I wish to repent, but I do not know how to set about it." You do know, because you are well aware that if you will privately ask the Priest whom God has set over you, he will be ready and willing to instruct you about repentance. Why then do you not begin at once? You are Christ's scholar ; He will soon come to hear you your lesson : why do you not set about learning it? You are Christ's servant ; He has set you your task, He is before the door, why are you not doing as He bid you? Fear not to begin, but fear to put off beginning. Late obedience is better than continued rebellion. A task half-done is better than not begun. Begin at once, and put all your strength to the work : that when He shall appear, you may look up to Him as a child that hopes for pardon, and not have your portion with those who shall call on the mountains and hills to cover them.

SERMON XXXI.

THE WONDERS OF GOD'S LAW.

Ps. cxix. 18.

“ Open Thou mine eyes, that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law.”

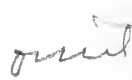
You may have observed, how all the way through this hundred and nineteenth Psalm the Prophet David speaks of the Law, the Commandments, the Testimonies, the Statutes, the Judgements, the Ordinances, the Word, the Truth of Almighty God. Now all those words, one or other of which occurs, I believe, in every verse of the Psalm, with only two or three exceptions, all these words, I say, the Truth, the Word, the Ordinances, the Judgements, the Statutes, the Testimonies, the Commandments, the law of God, all mean nearly the same thing. They mean the Will of the Almighty God, made known sufficiently, in any way whatever, to His servants. Not the Will of God, simply in itself, but the Will of God made known upon sufficient evidence to us His reasonable creatures. Not as it is made known in writing only, but in memory also, handing it down through all ages; or by the natural conscience of all men, causing itself to be heard. That is the Word and Law of God, concerning which

David speaks so much in this Psalm. But since He has, in His great mercy, vouchsafed to have it set down in writing, not all at once, but at sundry times and in divers manners, in the Books of Holy Scripture, we are to understand this Psalm very particularly of Holy Scripture. The Law, the Statutes, the Commandments, the Ordinances of God, are to us more especially, the Books which His Holy Spirit caused to be written for our learning.

David, when he wrote the Psalm, in saying so much of the Law, meant especially the five Books of Moses. We, as we say or sing it now, mean the whole Bible; not the old Law only, but also the new; not the Books of Moses chiefly, but the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These two sets of Books, the writings of Moses and the Prophets on the one hand, the four Gospels, with the Acts Epistles and Revelations on the other, the Old Testament and the New, are called indeed two Testaments, but in meaning and effect they are one and the same: for the first, the Old Testament, is the shadow or figure of the New, the one looking on to Christ, the other looking back to Him. That is the great thing for us to know and consider, whatever part of the Bible we are reading, or hearing, or remembering, that it all has respect unto Jesus Christ. He is there, from beginning to end, if we have but faith to see Him, *That* is the reason, why the Bible is so dear to all true earnest believers, and ought to be made so much of by us all, not because we can see and feel it to be the most beautiful and noble of all books; not because it tells us the truth without error, and goes to our hearts in a way which no other words, either

written or spoken, can do ; but because it is God's own Word speaking to us everywhere of His Son ; because, wherever it is, there is Jesus Christ, telling us something about Himself. A Bible is in short an outward visible sign, a kind of sacrament, seen by the eye, of the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, watching how we receive His Commandments, and how we regard the unspeakable things which He has done and suffered for us. Our Bibles, especially to those who can read, will be so many witnesses for or against us, when we come to give our account, how we have kept the things contained in them : as our Lord Himself, the Giver of the Bible, hath warned us. “^a He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My Words, hath one that judgeth him ; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” And this is the manner, wherein the Church instructs us to think of Holy Scripture at this time in particular.

This second week in Advent, we are to pray to God every day, that we may so use the Divine Book, as to “embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.” That is, we are to think of our Bibles, as given us especially to be a great help in preparing us for the Last Day. (Not only those who can read are to think in this way of Holy Scripture, but also those who cannot read. For if you cannot read, you can ask and hear : and there is no doubt that in every parish, by God's mercy, there are some, in many parishes, a good number, of persons, who without any knowledge of reading have somehow contrived to understand a good deal of the Bible,



^a S. John xii. 48.

overt
indeed all that is necessary to salvation. And if one person can do this, another in like circumstances can do the same also. Therefore I say that *all*, both those who cannot read, and those who can, ought to consider and use the Bible as a help, and a very great help, to prepare them against the day of Judgement.))

But in order to do this effectually, there is one thing never to be forgotten: and that is, that we must pray (as it is sometimes said) over our Bibles. We must evermore ask of that Blessed Spirit, by Whom the Holy Book was written, that He would enlighten our eyes to read it, and open our ears to hear it, in its true meaning, not after any fancies, either of our own, or of other men. And this is the great use of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm to all Christians rightly understanding it, that it supplies them with a great store of short and plain prayers, by which they may help themselves, as in all their duty, so especially in their reading and hearing the Scriptures; and in recollecting what they have heard or read. In many parts of the Christian world, this Psalm is appointed to be sung or said all through every day: and with good reason, since every day we have need of God's Law to shew us our way through the tempting and dangerous world, and need also of God's grace rightly to use and understand His Law. Every week then such prayers are suitable: but they are very particularly suitable in this week, because, as I said, this week our Church points out to us the Word of God, as intended to get us ready for our last dreadful account. Now, then, is a good time for Christians to say with all their hearts, "Open Thou mine eyes, that

I may see the wondrous things of Thy law." It being God's Word and Law, of course wondrous things were to be expected in it. For as the Lord Himself says, "^bAs the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Sometimes indeed there have been persons, perhaps there are some now, who imagine that God's Word, at least that part of it which concerns us, must all be clear and plain. There must not, as they think, be any mysteries, any wondrous things in it. God Almighty, they fancy, would not have made it necessary for us to believe anything which should be at all hard for us to find out and understand. But this is a mistake, for here you see plainly that there are wondrous things in God's Law; which it is of consequence for us to discern, (else, why does He teach us to pray that we may discern them?) and also that we cannot of ourselves discern them, else there would be no need for our asking Him to open our eyes. There are also two other mistakes, as concerning our use of Holy Scriptures, which this one short verse might go a great way to correct. Some men, knowing and believing that there are wonderful things in God's Law, think too much of their own sense and skill in finding out those wonderful things for themselves: as I once heard a man say, there was only one chapter in the Bible, which he could not understand. The man, who said that, was not very knowing or learned: but it is a kind of error, into which knowing and learned men are sadly tempted to fall: and therefore those among us, who have had the advantage of

^b Isa. lv. 9.

learning a little more than others, had need be very much on their guard; they had need pray to God to make them very humble, that they may not pretend to understand the wonders of His Book by their own natural sense.

But again, there are some of quite a different sort, who behave to their Bibles in quite a different way, and yet these also make a great mistake, and lose very much of the benefit of the Holy Book; I mean, such as say, "Because we are no scholars, we cannot see those wonders, which, as you tell us, are in the Bible: we know we shall not be able to see them, though we search the Bible never so much: we do not therefore trouble ourselves about such high matters: we cannot read, how then should we understand them?" I have said something already, to shew these persons that they are under a mistake: I would wish them moreover to consider that very few of the first Christians, whose faith was most entire and perfect, were at all able to read. But the Almighty heard their prayers, because they prayed and gave themselves up to Him in earnest. He heard their prayers, and opened their eyes, and they beheld wondrous things out of His Law; and if you, my brethren, those of you who seem to be most afraid of your own ignorance, will pray as they did, and give yourselves up after their pattern, to serve your Saviour, He will open your eyes also, and you shall understand your Bible, though you cannot read it. For as none can see these wonders of God in His written Word by their own natural wisdom, so there is no man so foolish and ignorant, but he shall be able to see them, when God opens his eyes. Wise and foolish, learned

and unlearned, alike, we may read our own history in that blind man, whom our Saviour cured by anointing his eyes with clay, (which clay He had made by spitting on the ground) and then bidding him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed, and came seeing. Of himself he could not have done anything towards opening his own eyes: he was born blind, and blind he must have continued, had it not been for Him Who is the true Light. But this one thing he could do, and this he did—he carefully and at once obeyed the directions which the Lord gave him. And he was rewarded with the gift of sight, which gift had never before been bestowed on one who was born blind. Just so it is with us all, in respect of that heavenly Light, the Light of Jesus Christ, seen in the Bible. Before our inward eyes are opened by the all-powerful grace of the Holy Ghost, we see nothing in the Holy Scriptures but good reading. When we go into a Church, we discern only a solemn building. But when, in answer to our dutiful prayers and endeavours to improve the grace of our Baptism, our Lord touches us, and anoints our eyes with His own especial grace, then our eyes are opened. We look up and see Him Who is doing so great things for us. Then, whether we read or hear the Holy Scriptures, we perceive in them Jesus Christ every where: we are filled with holy curiosity and amazement to find, how all along in the history and Law of the Jews something meets us to figure out the doings of our Lord, and to prepare men for the setting up of His Kingdom; and again, how both in the Old and in the New Scriptures every thing suits with our own daily experience; our own sins are

rebuked, our own dangers foreseen, our own wants provided for. And still Jesus Christ is in all, both Old and New; Jesus Christ, God and Man, crucified and gone into Heaven, and sending His Spirit to prepare us for His second Coming. These are the wondrous things which we may see in the Bible, when God has opened our eyes. And in a Church, instead of a mere solemn and goodly building, we behold the House of God and the Gate of Heaven, and Christ Himself in the midst of the two or three gathered together in His Name. So also in the Blessed Sacraments, Baptism to the natural eye is at best but an edifying ceremony. But Faith has her eyes opened to discern Christ Himself taking the child in His Arms, and the Spirit of God descending on the Font, in answer to the prayers of the Holy Church. Again, Confirmation, to the unbelieving, looks merely like a promise, made by a young person, and received by a Bishop; but when Christ has opened our eyes, we understand this wondrous thing concerning it out of God's Law; that the Holy Comforter is given to each one with the Bishop's blessing, to strengthen him for the keeping those promises. Once more: what is the Holy Communion to one whose eyes are not opened by heavenly grace? Merely bread and wine, eaten and drunken in memory of our Lord's Last Supper; which may be instructive and affecting, but is no such very wondrous thing. But to eyes and hearts opened by the Lord, it is the very Body and Blood of the Lord in a holy Mystery.

By these instances we may partly understand how Christ answers the believing heart, when it prays,

“Open Thou mine eyes, and make me to understand wondrous things out of Thy law.” We may understand how sometimes, in a believing and thoughtful mood, a person contemplating Holy Scripture, and comparing it with what he knows of the world and especially of himself, and seeing how things new and old, far and near, are wonderfully ordered according to that blessed Book, and brought to one point (as it were) in our Lord Jesus Christ, and how the secrets of men's hearts are made manifest, I say, a person seeing and feeling all this may be for a time carried away and transported in a manner out of himself, and ready to cry out with holy David, “^c Lord, what love have I to Thy law, all the day long is my study in it. I will never forget Thy commandments, for with them Thou hast quickened me: I see that all things come to an end, but Thy commandment is exceeding broad.”

Thus it is sometimes, when good and devout thoughts prevail. But too soon, generally, the ordinary temper returns; the Bible is either found dull and uninteresting, or the interest we take in it is like what we take in an ordinary book: the history, perhaps, carries us along, or the beautiful flow of the words delights both our ear and mind:—but we are no longer lifted up nearer the very throne of God, nor seem in a manner to join from our very heart in the holy song of the Angels: “^dGreat and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are Thy Ways, Thou King of Saints.” Now, this is sad: but it must not too much dishearten us. We cannot always feel towards God, as we are

^c Ps. cxix. 97, 93, 96.

^d Rev. xv. 3.

sometimes allowed, by His mercy, to feel. Probably it would not be good for us. It might be too strong a temptation to proud and boastful thoughts. Let us then pray and strive indeed to behold the wondrous things of the Bible, and to think of them, and feel them as they ought to be felt; so deeply, so solemnly, as to be lifted up for the time above all earthly things: as the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, when, as they said afterwards one to another, their hearts burned within them, while Christ talked with them on the way, and while He opened unto them the Scriptures. Let us, I say, pray and strive for this: but let us not be too much cast down, if our ordinary mind seem to us a much lower mind than this. Give no wilful way to indifference, and of all things take care to be really anxious about shewing yourselves thankful to your great God and Saviour, by doing your very best. This will be your patience, and God will send comfort in His time: and when patience and comfort are sought in the dutiful use of God's Holy Word, there, be sure, will be the hope which our collect speaks of, "the blessed hope of everlasting Life, given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ." The comfort, the hope, are sure to come, if only we will work on in patience.

SERMON XXXII.

PRAYER FOR WISDOM.

S. JAMES i. 5, 6.

“If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”

WHEN the Scriptures speak of wisdom, they almost always mean *spiritual* wisdom: that kind of knowledge and good sense, by which men are aware what to do, in order to be fit for eternal life hereafter. What the world means by wisdom—the becoming great and rich, and knowing how to obtain most enjoyment for one’s self,—this is no part of the wisdom of the Bible. But a right sense of practical matters, judging truly which are trifles and which are of real consequence, what will please God and what will displease Him—this is indeed wisdom; this is what makes men wise unto salvation.

Now S. James here in the text supposes a person so far in earnest, as to desire the knowledge of the way to please his Maker. Such a person will presently find, that, left to himself, he greatly lacks wisdom; he is far from knowing clearly, on each occasion, what he must do, in order to please God; what thoughts,

words, and actions will best prepare him to be happy in Heaven. The Apostle, I say, supposes a man aware of his own blindness and ignorance, and tells him plainly how he may cure it. "Let him ask of God, Who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and wisdom shall be given him."

It will be well to consider this gracious promise with an eye to the subject of the services—the collect, I mean, and the Epistle, appointed by the Church for the present Sunday. They both relate to the use of the holy Scriptures. The Epistle tells us for what purpose the Scriptures were written: viz. for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of God's holy Word, might have hope. The collect is a prayer, that God's gracious purpose in giving the Bible to man may be fulfilled in us: that we may so read and use the divine Book, as to embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life. In other words, it is a prayer for spiritual wisdom: for what is spiritual wisdom, but a true understanding and remembrance of the Bible, in those matters, on which our life eternal depends?

According to S. James, then, the key to the Bible, the secret for obtaining the knowledge of God's Truth, is Prayer. "If any man lack wisdom," if he feel in himself that he does not hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the holy Scriptures as he could wish, "let him ask" that wisdom "of God, Who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." You see, the promise is quite express and positive; as is the like promise of our Saviour; "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto

^a S. Luke xi. 13.

your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

And to encourage us still more in our prayers, we are put in mind that God gives to all; that He gives liberally; that He does not upbraid, or unkindly remind people of His gifts.

He gives *to all*. The unthankful and the evil receive from Him life and breath, and light and air, and food and raiment, and health and friends, and innumerable blessings and comforts of various kinds. How much more may those expect, by His mercy, to grow better, who sincerely long and pray for improvement?

Again, the Almighty gives *liberally*. He opens His hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. It is His delight to be bountiful; He loves to be good and gracious; He is never tired of showing kindness. When you pray to Him to do you good, you pray to Him to do that in which He greatly delights. Can there be a greater encouragement to those who seriously desire good things of Him?

Further, we are put in mind of another circumstance, which, when it is found in men's earthly benefactors, is always accounted a great addition to their kindness. God *upbraideth not*: that is to say, He does not, like niggardly men, proudly reproach those to whom He has been bountiful, but shews them by His whole way of dealing with them, that all His intention is to do them good. Consider what an infinite host of favours we are every one of us receiving from the Almighty, every day and hour of our lives; and how quietly and silently He goes on, every succeeding day and hour, heaping up new favours upon us. If He call on us to thank and praise Him; if,

for that purpose, He remind us of past mercies ; it is not for His own sake, but purely for ours ; because thanking and praising Him is the best comfort we can have here, and the very preparation for happiness hereafter. Thus you see how truly it is said of the Bountiful Giver of all good to all men, that "He upbraideth not ;" and therefore no man has occasion to be shy of asking favours of Him, as they naturally are shy of asking favours of each other, as expecting, at some future time, to be reminded of them in a mortifying way. The more they ask of Him, the better He is pleased, provided only they ask devoutly. Instead of reproaching them with all He has done for them before, like proud and weak men when their petitioners keep returning, He encourages them to try again and again : the more we ask, the better He is pleased, provided only we ask with a good mind.

Such is the encouragement Christians have to pray : such the sure way, by which spiritual wisdom may be attained by all who will. Nevertheless, it is quite plain that few have such wisdom as I have mentioned ; few have a right practical understanding of the Scriptures. This is plain, were it only from the circumstance, that Christians agree so little among themselves what the Scriptures really mean : they disagree, not only in small circumstances, but in the most important points of faith and practice. Now, it is plain that where this happens, they cannot, more than one of them, be right ; and equally plain, that so far as they are wrong, they are wanting in true spiritual wisdom, in the right understanding of the Bible.

Now, how should this be ? that when the very Son

of God is come from Heaven to give men understanding, they should still be in blindness and darkness?

In the first place, many do not pray. The promise of understanding is to prayer; they who ask of God shall receive spiritual wisdom. No wonder if those who neglect to ask, however sharp and knowing they may be in other things, remain as children, without sense or discretion in their judgement of what relates to God's kingdom. It is to be feared that many great scholars have fallen into grievous errors, in spite of all their shrewdness and industry, for this simple reason, that they were not devout, they did not in earnest ask God's blessing on their labours. But do not imagine, that great scholars only are likely to go wrong in that way. Every man has his own soul to save, and has need to be a scholar in the Scriptures, so far as knowing the way to save it. But if he set about this study, either reading or hearing the gospel, in a proud, conceited, self-sufficient way, then, the quicker he is in natural understanding, and the more diligent he is to learn, and the more leisure he enjoys, the farther he is likely to go wrong in his notions of the meaning of Scripture. For, depending on himself, he will not ask of God; and not asking, he will not obtain. When I say he will not ask, I do not suppose that any person, imagining himself to be a Christian, entirely neglects prayer to God. But I mean that he will not ask earnestly; he will not pray from his very heart. That is, in God's sight, he will not pray; for God looks on the very heart, and judges by what He finds there.

Now to those persons of whom I have been speaking, who are too self-sufficient to pray, according

to the true sense of the word prayer, for a right knowledge of the meaning of the sacred Scriptures, to them add the infinite number of those who do pray, but not in faith ; and you will cease to wonder that so little should be found of spiritual wisdom even among Christians. For it is most distinctly to be noted, that the promise made by God's Holy Spirit in the text depends on these two conditions : first, that a man pray ; and secondly, that he pray in faith. "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering : for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed : For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord : a double-minded man, is unstable in all his ways." Putting the Apostle's words all together, we may perhaps see plainly enough what the faith is which he requires : it is such a faith as will keep a man from wavering, keep him from being double-minded, divided, unsteady in his ways. People are wanting in this faith, they waver in their prayers for spiritual wisdom, they are double-minded, divided, unstable, when they do not really intend, supposing God shews them the truth, to practise it with all their might. They have faith, they are single-minded, simple, steady worshippers of God, when they truly and heartily purpose to perform His will the moment they know it. Balaam, for example, had not faith, when he desired God to let him know whether it was His will for him to go with Balak's messengers or no. He doubted not that God was, nor that he was in God's hand : but he did not devoutly give himself up to God, to do what seemed Him good : he wavered between his Maker and the wages of unrighteousness.

Therefore, much as he knew of God's wonders, he could not be said to have spiritual wisdom. The Jews at Capernaum had not faith, when they asked our Lord to tell them, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" For when they found that God's work was not such as they had hoped, that it was altogether a spiritual thing contrary to their schemes of worldly greatness, they left our Saviour and walked no more with Him. These examples may serve to shew, that the faith which recommends our prayers to God, is when we give ourselves up, in the thought and purpose of our hearts, to obey His gracious will, once made known to us in answer to our prayers.

And perhaps it might be well to bear this in mind, when we are looking at those portions of the Gospel, which promise every thing to faith and prayer. For example, where our Saviour tells His disciples, "^b What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." This, it is likely, may have startled many. For who, it may be said, ever received all the blessings he prayed for? But this is answered by asking again, Who ever, when he prayed, believed that he received what he asked for, in the full meaning of our Saviour's words? For by such belief, it should seem that He meant such a faith as S. James describes in the text: full trust in Him, and entire submission to His holy will. Any person so minded, any person thoroughly willing to let God choose for him, would in reality always believe that he receives of God what he prays for. For he would

^b S. Mark xi. 24.

be more sure of God's love, and disposition to do the very best for him, than of his own love for himself. Suppose, then, he prays for any worldly comfort, for his own health, or for the health or life of a dear friend. It will all the while be strong upon his mind, that God only is able to judge whether this, if granted, would prove such a blessing and comfort as one naturally imagines. Therefore, how earnestly soever a thoroughly Christian devout soul may feel and utter any particular wish, it will always be tempered with this conviction, deeply rooted in his heart, that, however God may appear to deny him, He will in fact grant the blessing he asks for: and if not in the very form and manner in which he asks for it, yet still the same blessing will come somehow, he is quite sure, in a way which God knows to be better.

Our Saviour's words then, of which we are speaking, may perhaps not improperly be thought to mean as if He had said, All things, whatsoever ye desire when ye pray, ye desire, supposing them to be really best for you. Now then make up your minds to this, that God loves you so well, as never to deny you what is really best for you, except by your own fault. Make up your minds to this in earnest, and you will be as sure, when you kneel down, to have the meaning of your prayers granted, as a good child is, when asking a favour of a wise and kind parent. Nay, you will be as much more certain of it, as God is wiser and more kind than the wisest or kindest parent.

Such seems to be the meaning of our Saviour's promise, in regard of all our prayers generally: and S. James's words are the same promise in regard particularly of spiritual wisdom. Of that, as of all other

blessings, it is quite certain, by God's word, that whoever comes to ask for it with a heart thoroughly resigned and contented, that is, in other words, with a faithful heart; that man shall receive what he asks.

And here, as it seems to me, is a sufficient answer to those persons who allow themselves to be perplexed by the many disputes among Christians. How, say they, can we know which is right, since there are so many good sort of people on one side and on the other; people who no doubt pray for wisdom, and yet they cannot come to an agreement? Certainly it is sad that so it should be: but no one need be perplexed by it, who considers how rare a thing it is to find a man thoroughly contented, and willing to resign himself to God in good earnest. And till a person is such, he cannot claim the promise of spiritual wisdom; and it is no wonder if he go wrong, though he do pray often, and be in many things devout and conscientious. The like may be said of another sorrowful truth, namely, that so many persons are found holding right opinions and using good prayers, yet improving very little, if not going back, in real spiritual wisdom; that wisdom which teaches men practically to prefer heaven to earth. Their opinions may be right, and their prayers good, but their purposes and thoughts of heart may be very unstable and unsound. They ask, perhaps, every morning, that they may do always what is righteous in God's sight, and every evening, that their hearts may be set to obey His commandments: but, it may be, all the while, they have no serious intention of the kind. What wonder if, when the temptation comes, they fall away almost of course, just as if they never prayed at all?

But, it will be said, who has this intention ? who is so perfect as to pray in that faith, which is quite certain to make prayer heard ? And the answer must be, as in the matter of purity, of charity, and of all Christian graces. No one is perfect in any one of them : but in such measure as you come nearer perfection, so much the more nearly are the promises of Christ fulfilled in you. Therefore, to cure the imperfection of your prayers, and learn how to ask for wisdom in faith, is not a thing to be done at once. Try, the very next time you pray. Think of the sin, whatever it be, which most easily prevails against you : and you will find how hard it is really to mean what you say, when you beg of God's Holy Spirit to guard you against that sin. Tempers and desires, long indulged, are like roots that wind deep in the ground ; they will make themselves felt at your very heart, and will render it very difficult indeed to make good resolutions in earnest. Perhaps your good purposes will be the fainter, from remembering that you have often before resolved in like manner to turn from the error of your ways, and all your good meanings have vanished away, when temptation returned upon you. Or you may have gone some way in repentance, yet not feel yourself so easy in mind, so thoroughly possessed of the comforts of a good conscience, as you had expected beforehand. All these scruples, and many more, occur continually to hinder Christians from holy resolutions, when they pray. But what then ? It is for our life : we must have holy resolutions when we pray, or we shall never pray as we ought to do ; we shall never obtain that heavenly wisdom, which only can bring us to life

everlasting. Although, then, you fall after your prayers, although your resolutions, too often, prove utterly weak and unstable, yet go on and resolve anew: watch yourself the more earnestly: remember the powerful aid promised, and the infinite loss, if you fail at last.

“^c For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

“Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

^c S. Mark ix. 36, 37.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD. I. ITS NATURE AND OFFICE.

ISA. lxvi. 21.

*"I will also take of them for Priests, and for Levites,
saith the Lord."*

WE heard last Sunday, how that Almighty God does on these Sundays in Advent send in a manner His holy Angels to call us His people to account for our use of the great gifts which He has given us by way of preparation for the day of Judgement. The Angel of last Sunday did, as it were, inquire of us, "How did you use your Bibles last year?" To-day he inquires of us, "What use did you make of that other great gift, the Priesthood or Ministry of the New Testament; the pastors or shepherds of Christ's flock, within reach of whom you have been placed by His providence?" We hear, from time to time, of places in the world, where the people would give anything to have a clergyman among them. For, having more or less sense of religion, they find by sad experience, what a sad thing it is to want that kind of help. When we think of persons, destitute as they are, surely we must feel that it is a call to us, to be very thankful for the privileges we have

enjoyed all our life long, of being within reach of the Christian Ministry; and very exact in calling ourselves to account for the way in which we have employed that privilege. The voice of the Church, this week, is very plain and very earnest, in reminding us of this part of our trial, and that, in more ways than one. We pray for seven days, morning and evening, for the ministers and stewards of Christ's Mysteries, that they may prepare and make ready His way; and also for those who are to be ordained next Sunday, and for the ordaining Bishops. And in our Communion Service, as you have just heard, we are put in mind of S. Paul, how he would have us think of the Christian Ministry, and of S. John the Baptist, how he set us a pattern of it. You perceive then that we hardly follow the leading of Almighty God and His Church, unless we think a good deal at this time of the Christian Priesthood.

For there *is* a Priesthood among Christians. The Almighty has not left us in that respect worse provided for, than He did His first people the Jews. As He gave us the whole Bible, a more perfect gift than He gave to the Jews, by how much the Old Testament and the New taken together are more precious than the Old Testament alone; so hath He ordained among us a better and holier Priesthood than theirs, by how much they who are partakers of Christ are more highly favoured than they who merely fore-shadowed Him. As the Law is changed, so is the Priesthood; and both, of course, changed exceedingly for the better. Let us consider, how we are taught this.

First, we had need clearly to understand, what is meant when we talk of a priesthood. We may take the account given of it by a prophet, in the first book of Samuel. The Lord there says, that He chose Aaron out of all the tribes of Israel to be His priest, for these three purposes—To offer upon His Altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Him. To offer upon God's Altar, i. e. to offer sacrifice, to present solemnly before God the various slain gifts and sacrifices, which He had promised to receive at His people's hands. That was the first and principal office of a priest among the Israelites. The second was, burning incense of sweet odours, without which it was not permitted to appear in the Lord's immediate Presence. And the third was, to wear an ephod. What was an ephod? A mysterious dress, made after the pattern shewed to Moses in the mount, and remarkable especially for this, that on the two shoulders of it, in the most conspicuous place, were engraven on precious stones the names of all the tribes of Israel. So that when the Priest entered into the holy place, wearing his ephod, he was, in fact, very solemnly appearing in the people's stead before God. These were the three points which marked the Priests out from among other men in the times of the old law. They were ministers of sacrifice, ministers of incense, and they wore the dress which shewed them to represent the whole of God's people. Such were the sons of Aaron among the Jews. For no man might take such holy ministries upon himself, but only such as were "a called of God, as was Aaron:" Aaron first, and, after him,

^a Heb. v. 4.

his sons and their posterity. None else might sacrifice, burn incense, or wear the ephod. If any one, not of Aaron's seed, attempted to do so, fearful indeed was the punishment he drew upon himself. Either he was smitten with leprosy, or the fire of God broke out upon him. Thus things went on for many hundreds of years.

But, all the while, hints were being given by the Prophets, that the whole service, the priesthood itself, and all that the priests did before God, was typical—a figure of better things to come, serving, as we have been since plainly told, to the mere example and shadow of heavenly things. In various ways the Lord gave His people tokens, that One should arise, in Whom all this should be fulfilled in its true meaning: Who should put an end to the priesthood of Aaron and his sons by accomplishing what they foreshadowed. And this was the Son of God Incarnate, our Saviour Christ: Who offered the one true Sacrifice of expiation, when He submitted to the death of the Cross: Who took away from Aaron's sons the office of burning incense, by undertaking Himself to be our heavenly Intercessor, to present all our prayers before the high Altar in Heaven: lastly, He took, for His own sole wearing, the ephod or robe of the priests with the names of all Israel on it, in that, becoming one of us, Bone of our bone, and Flesh of our flesh, Himself took all our infirmities: His single appearing for us before God is as if we all appeared; we are all gathered or summed up in Him. Thus our Lord ended the priesthood of Aaron and his sons by accomplishing all that it signified.

Again, hints were given in the old Scriptures that He, in Whom Aaron's priesthood would end would also be a Priest after another order, a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec: not for a time, as Aaron and his sons, but for ever: such a Priest, as should be a King also: such a Priest, as should be greater far than Abraham: such a Priest, as that it should be a main point of His office to bring forth bread and wine to the people of God. All this, as you well know, was accomplished principally in our Lord and Saviour Christ. He is King of Righteousness and King of Peace, and He is also Priest of the Most High God; a Priest for ever, because He has to offer for ever His own Body and Blood, the true Bread and Wine, to His Father in heaven for us; the continual remembrance in heaven of the Sacrifice of His Death, even as in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper there is continual remembrance of the same on earth. He is the true Melchisedec, moreover, in that He distributes to the people of God that which He offers on their behalf: as Melchisedec gave Abraham the bread and wine which he needed, with a special blessing. Thus is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God Incarnate, the very True and only Priest, in Whom, as the Head and Surety of the whole race, being both God and Man, all are gathered in one before God. He suffered for all, He intercedes for all, He offers for all, He blesses all.

But further; although our Lord Christ is the One High Priest by Whom we may draw nigh unto God, yet as there were priests before His coming on earth, true priests really representing Him, though of an order infinitely below Him; priests after the order

of Aaron which has come to an end: so now that He has gone into Heaven, He has still His priests under Him in His Church on earth; priests really representing Him, really communicating to us here the blessings which He obtains for us by His heavenly Intercession: priests, however, no longer after the order of Aaron, so as to offer bloody sacrifices, but after the order of Melchisedec, uniting themselves and their people, by the memorial which He appointed, to the sacrifice which He is always making in Heaven. It is of us, who are now and at all times called Priests in the Church of God, and of the Deacons who minister with us in their station in the same Church, that the Prophet speaks in the text, when he says, "I will take of the Gentiles," i. e. of all nations who shall turn to Christ, "some to be Priests and some to be Levites, saith the Lord." These are they whom S. Paul calls the ministers and stewards of Christ's Mysteries: ordained to offer to the Father, from time to time, that Bread and Wine which is His Body and Blood, which He is for ever offering in Heaven. They offer the prayers also, as the old priests used to burn incense; and they represent the whole people, as *they* bore the names of the tribes on their shoulders. And they are like Melchisedec, in that, after they have offered and blessed, they minister to the people. It is a main part of their calling to distribute what they have blessed. The Communion, which they celebrate, is a sacrament as well as a sacrifice. It is in that way that it makes us individually partakers of that which our Lord is then and always offering for us, i. e. of Himself, His own blessed Body and Blood. The Priests who celebrate it do so in Christ's

stead ; it is He Who gives it by their hands, as by their hands He made it what it is, by their hands He offers it to His Father. It is His doing, not at all their's, all the while, from beginning to end.

Once more, as the sons of Aaron, and none else, might be priests of old, so none are priests now, but such as are the spiritual offspring of the Apostles ; and their being so is known, as you are many of you aware, by their having received Ordination from some Bishop. For none are in the Apostles' place, but the Bishops.

See then, brethren, what a special token of our Lord's being among us it is, to have His clergy among us: those whom He ordained to be as Himself among men, to join in His own continual offering of His own Body and Blood to the Father, and to give the same Body and Blood to His people, or withhold it, if it ought not to be given. If you saw the Queen's guards and attendants, you would know that the Queen herself, very probably, was at hand ; so the very sight of a clergyman is a sign to faith that the Lord is nigh at hand. We have all of us had this sign, the presence of God's ministers among us, now for so many years. Most of us, I dare say, can remember it as long ago, as we can remember any thing. Well : what fruit has come of it ? Have we drawn near to the Sacrifice which Christ by them has been continually offering for us ? How many here are regular communicants, or in a way to be so ? And if not, why not ? How can it be safe to go on turning our backs upon Christ interceding for us, giving Himself to us ?

Again, since great part of the Priest's office is to

offer the incense of prayer for the people, we should consider how it has been with us this last twelve-month in respect of those prayers which the priest offers constantly in Church. Have we duly attended them? Have we wished in earnest to do so? Have we seriously attended to them when we were present? Have we minded the priest's counsel, borne with his infirmities, endeavoured to be the better for his reproofs? A good many will find by and by, that very much of their trial, standing or falling, really depended on the use they made of the warnings of Christ's messengers.

One thing more there is to be mentioned, a material part of this doctrine of the Priesthood, which I earnestly desire and charge you all to take notice of. As Holy Scripture plainly signifies that there would be among Christians a separate order of priests, ministering under Christ for their brethren, so it also teaches, that in another sense, *all* Christians are priests, priests and kings to God and the Father, a royal priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices. This priesthood of all Christians depends indeed on that priesthood which belongs to clergymen only. For how is any one a king and a priest to God except by union with Christ the true Melchisedec, King of peace, and Priest of the Most High God? And how can any one be united to Christ, except through those Sacraments, for the celebrating of which He hath ordained clergymen, priests? So it is, indeed, brethren. As the Jews, compared with others, were a kingdom all of priests, all made up of persons especially dedicated to God, and professing to be His servants, so Christians still more, by

how much they are nearer to God. We are all priests then, so far : how ought priests to behave ? for we are one and all bound to much the same rule of behaviour. A priest should think much of the sacrifice he has to offer. Are we thinking, night and day, of Christ the great Sacrifice of all, and of the sacrifice of ourselves, our souls and bodies, which we ought to be constantly making to Him ? A priest should not trifle his life away ; his heart should be set upon great and serious things : a priest should of all things be careful to avoid leading into sin. My brethren, though you are not clergymen, depend upon it you are so far in God's sight priests, that your sentence, if you fall away, will be worse than that of heathens who were never brought near Him : as your crown will be more glorious, if you persevere.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD. II.

MUTUAL DUTIES OF PRIEST AND PEOPLE.

MAL. ii. 7.

“The Priest’s lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.”

WE were reminded, last week, of that precious gift of God’s Holy Word, His Word written in the books of the Old and New Testament, and left with us to prepare us for eternity. This week we are reminded of another great gift, which we must never forget in our preparation for the last Day: i. e. the Apostolical Ministry. The collect mentions before God those who are ministers and stewards of His mysteries, i. e. of His Word and Sacraments, and begs a blessing on their labours,—the great and unspeakable blessing, that hearts may be converted, and the people of Christ found acceptable in His sight. The Epistle declares that the Apostles, and the other missionaries working under them, were to be accounted of as “^a ministers of Christ and stewards of the Mysteries of God.” And the Gospel sets before

^a 1 Cor. iv. 1.

us S. John Baptist, as a pattern for Christian clergymen. On the whole then you see clearly that this Sunday calls our attention to the Ministry, quite as distinctly as last Sunday called it to the Scriptures. And if we would enter entirely into the mind of Christ, and thank Him worthily for what He has done for us, we must think very much, not only of the gift of His Bible, but also of that other gift of a standing ministry, intrusted with the Bible, to teach it in its true meaning, to keep it from being mixed with the corruptions of men. In this respect, as in most others, the first Testament was a shadow and image of the second; the Old law, of the New. For under the old law also there were two gifts given to help God's people, and mark them as distinct from all others; there was the gift of a written law, and there was also the gift of a regular continued ministry or set of persons, to *guard* that law, and teach it in its true meaning. The written law, in the first place, was, as you know, the ten Commandments written on two Tables of stone and shut up in the Ark: afterwards the Books of Moses, containing those commandments, and a great many other precepts. And then by degrees the other Books of the Old Testament, especially the prophets, were added at sundry times, as the good providence of God might appoint. That was the written law of the Jews, and surely one of their greatest privileges. But over and above this, it pleased God to give them a priesthood; a set of persons to be continued from age to age, to offer sacrifices to Him, and perform the other services ordained for them in the law. And these priests were in an especial manner charged to

take care of the law, and to instruct the people how to keep it: as the Holy Ghost expressly declares in the text: "The priest's lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth." And so from the beginning we find that Aaron was constantly joined with Moses in declaring God's will to the people. And it was said unto Aaron and his sons when they were first consecrated, that they were to "^bteach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord had spoken unto them by the hand of Moses." Thus the Old Testament and the New, the law and the Gospel, the shadow and the Substance agree together in this, among other things, that they both provided God's people not only with a written word, but also with a set of persons appointed by the Lord to tell them the true meaning of it.

Of course, for so serious a work as this, and so high a trust, it was quite necessary the persons set apart should be known by some plain and undoubted mark, which all whom it concerned might easily be aware of, if they would. And so it was ordered indeed. The outward mark of the old priests under the law was their true and real descent, in the way of natural birth, from Aaron the first High Priest, whom God Himself had appointed by especial revelation. The outward mark of the new priests under the Gospel, the chief among whom were called first Apostles, and afterwards Bishops, is their having Christ's commission given to them by laying on of the hands either of Apostles or Bishops, for the purposes of the priesthood. This is a true spiritual,

^b Lev. x. 11.

as the other a true earthly descent, and surely we ought to thank God with all our hearts for giving us so plain a mark, easy to be known and enquired of by all men, whereby Christian people may know who are really and truly God's Priests, ordained by Him to administer to them the Word and Sacraments of our Lord.

By this it appears, that the Priests of God, as well as His Prophets of old time, are truly and really, as Malachi says in the text, "messengers of the Lord of Hosts;" persons sent on His errand, with such a commission as this, "^c I do send thee unto" such and such a people, or parish, "and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: and they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house) yet shall know that there hath been a Prophet among them." It is said to us, as to our Lord's own Apostles and elders, "^d He that heareth you heareth Me: and he that despiseth you despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me." It could not be otherwise, according to those other words, so plainly spoken to the Apostles and their successors: "^e As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."

Such being the commission intrusted by our Lord Jesus Christ to His priests, it is plain that all who know of it must be aware of two sets of duties, one the duty of the priests themselves, the other of the Christian people committed to their charge. Both duties are distinctly set down in the Prophet's saying in the text. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge:" that is *our* duty in respect of the word

^c Ezek. ii. 4, 5.

^d S. Luke x. 16.

^e S. John xx. 21.

of God: "they should seek the law at his mouth," that is the duty of the people, the flock of Christ. And both these duties are at once understood to follow from the priest being what he is. He is the messenger, the Angel of the Lord of hosts; therefore he must not forget nor pervert any portion of his sacred message. He must keep it carefully, and deliver it with all faithfulness. Again, the priest is the messenger of the Lord of hosts, therefore the people, the subjects of the Lord of hosts, must attend to the priest's message, and receive the law at his lips. Nothing in the world can be plainer, and if either of these two be wanting, things are seen to go wrong in the Church. Just as in bodily disease the physician has need to be skilful, else he will neither understand the disease, though the symptom be never so plainly told him, nor will bethink him of the remedy. The physician's lips then in this case, must preserve knowledge, and the sick persons must seek their cure at his hands: they must come and tell him of their case, and submit to his enquiries, and tell him what he asks them, else he will not know how to prescribe for them. Thus the duties of priest and people in their several places may be understood by considering the duties of the sick man and the physician.

Now, however, and in this place, it cannot of course be expected, that we should speak to you much of the duties of a clergyman. Clergymen of course ought to think of them night and day, and especially to remember them in the solemn Ember weeks, whereof this is one. But our business here in the pulpit is of course to help Christ's people to

consider about their own duties. And the particular duty spoken of in the text is, that you, knowing the mysteries of Christ, i. e. His Word and Sacraments, to be committed to us, should seek the law at our hands, i. e. should come reverently to the priests of our Lord to be told concerning His Will. Though you have the Bible at home, and though you may be able to read it, and may seem to yourself to have a fair understanding of all the material parts of it, you must not neglect this other help which God hath given you for a knowledge of His Word, namely, proper application to the priest, seeking the law at his hands.

One way of doing this is the constant use of the Prayer Book ; for that is in fact, the voice of all the priests of the English Church, and among the rest of your own priest, concerning the true meaning of the Bible ; and since priests, for all their high trust, are but men, subject to many infirmities, if not to many sins, and too apt, alas ! to differ from one another, on very serious points, in the message they have to deliver, it is a very great cause of thankfulness, surely, to Almighty God, that He has given us such a book as the Prayer Book, by which, when the worst comes to the worst, and we, for any reason, are unable to get the help we want from our pastors now living, we may nevertheless in all great things be secure against going far astray. For in all great things, the Prayer Book is really the voice of the ancient Church.

But of course the intention of the Church always is, that, besides our Bibles and Prayer Books, every one of us should have a living and speaking pastor

within reach, to whose teaching we should reverently attend. And it is this chiefly, I imagine, which is meant, when we are told to seek the law at the priest's mouth. Our seeking the law, that is, our resorting to the priest for instruction, may be either general, when the whole congregation assemble in the Church to hear sermons, catechisings or readings from Holy Scripture; or we may seek the priest's instruction for ourselves, specially and particularly, as, when a person goes to the clergyman in private, and tells or asks him something, in which his own soul is concerned. Both these, hearing sermons in public, and asking advice in private, are ways of seeking the law at the priest's mouth, both are warranted in Holy Scripture, both distinctly encouraged by our English Prayer Book. As for sermons, Scripture says, "f Preach the word;" and praises those who come together to hear it. And the Prayer Book particularly directs those who answer for little children, to take care that they hear sermons when they are of age; it also ordains a sermon, if it may be had, for every Communion in Church. Therefore it is plainly the duty of Christian people to seek reverently the instruction offered them by Jesus Christ through His messengers in the solemn assembly. And is it not equally their duty, if need be, to apply privately to their pastor for spiritual teaching and comfort in their own special needs? What are those special needs? Many and various, no doubt, even as are the diseases of the body: but the Prayer Book especially mentions two: one in the exhortation to Holy Communion, the

f 2 Tim. iv. 2.

other in the office for the Visitation of the sick. According to the first of these, he who cannot satisfy his own conscience about coming to Holy Communion but requireth further comfort or counsel, is to come to his own, or some other pastor, and open his grief. According to the second, when a man is sick, (and surely there is just as much reason when he is well) he is to be moved to make special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. In these two cases, doubt concerning Holy Communion, and remorse of conscience about serious sin of any kind, the Church bids us resort to some one of her priests whom we can trust, learned in God's word to give us good advice, and discreet, to keep our secret faithfully. And in other cases, when people need instruction, not exactly answering to these, (as, if a person were perplexed how to act in a particular case, or how to understand something in the Bible or Prayer Book) no one can doubt that our Lord's ministers are the persons to be consulted, just as the physician is the person to be consulted when a man would know how to treat his bodily complaints. This private ministry of God's holy word is the special gift of our Saviour, provided for our help and relief in such cases. And if, from want of taking that help, we fall into sin, and our soul's condition grow worse, who can say that it is not our own fault? just as it would be the sick man's own fault if he stubbornly or carelessly refused to see the physician, and therefore grew worse and worse. Yet so it is, my brethren, that few in comparison, among us, appear to make use of this gift of our Lord, that He hath appointed persons to whom

we may open our griefs, whose duty is not only to give us good advice and instruction, but also to forgive our sins, truly confessed and repented of, in the name of Jesus Christ. Few in comparison, among us make much use of this means of grace ; even as in some countries, few, we are told, read regularly in holy Scripture, and in others few attend the preaching of sermons. Now wherever either of these is neglected, there the fulness of Christian instruction, such as Christ intended it for His people, is so far wanting. Therefore I suppose, it is much to be wished, that the faithful people of this country, who, generally speaking, are ready enough to hear sermons, and to read and hear the Bible, would be a little more ready than they are to trust the shepherds of their souls with their spiritual secrets ; to resort to them for private instruction and help, in difficulties either of faith or practice. Why should there be so little of this ? Why should so many of those who are diseased in heart, sick of sin and inward trouble, longing to be at peace with God and not knowing how ; why should they go on year after year hiding their grief, and letting it consume them secretly, while, like a festering sore, it grows worse and worse ? “^gTake heed in the plague of leprosy, saith the Lord by Moses, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you.” Now leprosy, to us Christians, means grievous sin : and this command is much the same as if Scripture said to us Christians, “Take heed when your conscience is troubled with any serious sin, that you open your grief to some of God’s

^g Deut. xxiv. 8.

priests, if you know of one whom you can trust: and reverently follow his good advice for your cure." Why should we shrink, so much as we commonly do, from following this tender and fatherly counsel? The reasons are not hard to imagine. Sin is shameful, and confession therefore is bitter; and besides, many are naturally bashful, and slow to tell another, (how gentle and trustworthy soever,) of their own inward trials and troubles. It is quite natural: who can blame them? But is it not a pity, that they should carry this so far, as to keep away from holy duties, to remain at a distance from God, to go on with their sins festering and their souls decaying, when, it may be, one half hour's confidential talk with the spiritual physician might be the beginning of a happy cure? S. James spoke to such shy and bashful persons, as well as to others, when he wrote, "h Confess your faults one to another." Much less may those be excused, who decline the priest's private instruction for fear of the trouble it would give them, and the strictness of life it would seem to bring after it: a feeling which still keeps too many back from seeking Confirmation and Holy Communion. But the worst of all is, when men draw back from spiritual counsel and from any thing like opening their grief, out of a secret love to some sin, which they feel they should have to confess, but they have not made up their minds to forsake it. No doubt, this is the sad reason which makes some, even in their sickness, and many more in their health, draw back from the ministers of God, look coldly upon them, discourage their talk, and shew too plainly

^h S. James v. 16.

that they wish them away. As holy Job has it, “ⁱThey say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.” God forbid that this should be your case or mine, and I am far from thinking that it is the case of all who decline confidential talk with their pastor. Still each of us will do well to fear for himself something of this kind; and if, for shyness, or in obedience to those set over him, or for any other reason, he fail to seek the law at the priest’s lips, so much the more humbly and earnestly should he watch and pray, lest the Evil one tempt him the more, for seeing him so far left to himself.

I dare say, moreover, that many are kept from applying to their pastors in a way that would be good for them, by the mere strangeness and awkwardness of the thing: it is a new thing, and they know not how to set about it. Who should blame them? they cannot help it: but I should advise them to ask some good and wise friend—a parent, if possible, or some one in the place of a parent, he will tell them how to proceed. And let this and all other plans that we think of trying for our soul’s good, be specially committed in prayer to our Lord, the lover of souls. He will either help you how to speak to your spiritual Pastor, or will guide you Himself by His Spirit in the right way. And take care that both in your prayers to Him and in your applications to His servants the Priests, you try to seek for duty rather than comfort. And may He of His undeserved mercy give us grace to help you here, and bring both us and you to His great Absolution in the Day of Judgement.

ⁱ Job xxi. 14.

SERMON XXXV.

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD. III.

FINAL MEETING OF PRIEST AND PEOPLE.

COL. i. 28.

“ That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

MY brethren, I am going to ask you a question, which concerns both you and me as nearly as possible. It is just this. Why am I standing here at this moment? and why are so many hundreds and thousands of persons standing at this very time in their respective pulpits, in the parishes of England and elsewhere, expecting that the people should be there, to listen to them, as they have been before to pray with them, to confess their sins and their faith, and to praise God? And why, when I and the rest who are now preaching are come down from our pulpits and gone out of Church, and go in and out among the rest in the ways and doings of ordinary life, why are we still to be regarded and considered as a distinct order of men, set apart and separated from other Christians? In one word, what is the use of the clergy? To be kind and helpful in such ways as they can? to wait on people in the way of bodily charity, to persuade people to be quiet and orderly,

decent and moral? to keep all, as they best may, peaceful and comfortable in their several parishes, and to set the best example they can? No doubt these are all duties belonging to us of the clergy; such as God and man expect of us: woe be unto us if we neglect them. But you know, brethren, without my telling you, that a clergyman is bound to something more than this. What is that something more? Is it to teach persons in public and private? to take care that they do not grow up and go on in entire ignorance of things, needful to their duty? or again, to perform the outward ministrations and solemn worship of the Christian Church, for which you come together in this place? Yes, indeed, my brethren, the teacher's work, and still more the minister's work in Church are most high and holy and necessary *parts* of the calling of the ministers of Christ, but they are not *all*. There is another thing to be thought of, without which all will go wrong: and that is, the *end* of our ministry, the prize and purpose of our calling. If we do not, all of us, bear that in mind, priest and people alike, the proper work of the clergy will be left undone. Christ will not be glorified, nor His people profited, as they should be. Well, what *is* the end of our ministry? What but the salvation of souls, of every soul committed to our charge? "I preach Christ," says the Apostle, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom," (i. e. with as much care and skill, and earnest endeavour, as ever I can, I do it to the very best of my power,)—to what purpose? that the place may go on quietly and decently? that we may set a good example to other Christians? that there may

be no gross immoralities? that we may love and wait on one another? that there may be no divisions among us, but we may all worship God in His Church together? No, these are all good and blessed things, but they are not, any one of them nor all together, what the Apostle goes on to mention, as the fruit and end and purpose of his preaching and teaching and warning. *That* is something beyond all these, something to which all these look forward, and without which all these would be vain. Well, what is it? It is just this, my brethren, "To present every man perfect in Christ Jesus," i. e. to bring the Christian people, committed to our charge, before the Judgment-seat at the Last Day, so well prepared, that God will count them perfect in Christ Jesus. So to work among them, that, by and by, they shall one and all appear on the right hand, not on the left; one and all hear the joyful voice, "Come ye blessed:" not the fearful voice, "Depart from Me, ye cursed." This, and nothing short of this, was the purpose, for which S. Paul preached, and taught, and warned people. This, and nothing short of this, is the use, the purpose, the end, of the clergy. As the Father sent Him, so He sent His Apostles, and through them His servants, the Bishops and pastors of His Church, to work under Him for the same end, for which He came into the world, that the world through Him might be saved. As the husbandman's work in the field all looks on to the harvest; as the sailor's work on board ship at sea all looks on to the haven where he would be; as the physician's work all looks on to the full recovery of the sick person; so the clergyman's work looks on to the salvation of the

souls committed to his charge. Our teaching, our preaching, our prayers, our Sacraments, our visits from house to house, whatever we do *as* clergymen, has no meaning, unless there be a day of Judgement. It is all in order to that one day.

This is one of the Church's great Advent lessons. It is what we are especially reminded of, this week, by the services in the Prayer Book; the collect and Gospel telling us of S. John Baptist, how he was sent to prepare the way for our Lord's first Coming, the Epistle teaching that the ministers of Christ and stewards of His mysteries, i. e. the clergy, must give account at His second Coming, and the collect praying that they may prepare and make ready the way for it. As we had last week to thank our merciful God for the blessed gift of Holy Scripture, His written Word left with us, to instruct us how to live so as to see His Face with joy: so this week we are to thank Him for His other great gift of the holy Apostolic ministry, His living heralds and messengers sent to warn us of His coming and to help us along in the right way and manner of meeting Him.

Perhaps you never considered the thing in this way. But is it not quite true, my brethren, when you come to think of it, that the very presence of God's clergy among us is a sign and a token from Him that there will be a judgement; that He will soon be here; that we ourselves shall be judged; that there is no time to lose, and we have need to be all making ready? You go into a place, where you never were before, you see a Church, with its spire, may be, shooting up into Heaven, as a silent finger, pointing towards Him Who is there, watching all your ways,

and Who will very soon come from thence, and force you, dead or alive, to look up and attend to His presence. You see perhaps a parsonage, or other buildings standing near the Church, or otherwise appearing to belong to it. These tell you of the care our Lord has taken to leave people, trusted by Him, to wait on your souls and to teach you about Him. Perhaps too you may see the minister walking about, and it may all strike you as a matter of course. You have been used to see such things in villages, and you have no more particular thought about it than of the ordinary shops and houses, and other people going about the streets. Yet all these things are, in fact, so many miracles and wonders of God's grace; so many signs of His coming and of the end of the world; as sure and certain, though not as terrible to our senses as the Cross, which, according to the belief of the ancient Christians, will shine out one day in the heavens, in sight of all the tribes of the earth, the very sign of the Son of Man. Good and bad, believers and unbelievers, when they see that sign in the skies, will alike look up, they will not be able to help it. Willing or unwilling, they will then, at last, confess that He is near at hand. And you, my brethren, if you are wise and dutiful, will use yourselves to feel and confess the same, when you are aware of His ministers going on with their work, in Church or out of Church, to prepare you for that day.

Just think over the words of the text, the words in which S. Paul describes the end and aim of the Christian ministry; "That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." That was S. Paul's

end and purpose and idea ; it was the thought which haunted him night and day, free or in chains, by land or by sea, among Jews or Gentiles ; wherever he went, his thought was, here are so many souls, souls fallen, souls in danger, yea lost, yet created at first after the image of God, and now redeemed by the Blood of His Son ; here they are ; God has put them in my way, He has brought them within my reach, what can I do to help them to salvation ? For that I *must* help them if I can, there is no doubt. My commission (S. Paul would say to himself) is to preach the Gospel to every creature, whom God shall bring near me by His providence. I am, if possible, “ to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Such were the thoughts of the great Apostle’s heart ; and such also should be the continual thought of every Christian priest’s heart, thinking on the people committed to his charge ; I am “ to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” To present ! Reflect, my brethren, upon that word ; what is it we mean, when we speak of one person’s presenting another to some third person ? We mean his introducing him, leading him into his presence, saying to him, Behold, here is such an one ; as when we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that S. Peter, having raised up Tabitha, called the Christians and widows, and *presented* her alive : i. e. shewed her to them bodily, caused them to set eyes upon her, and to take notice, that this is the very same whom you saw a while since dead, and now behold she is alive again : look well upon her, you see there can be no mistake. Or again when we read in S. Luke, how S. Joseph and the blessed Virgin Mary brought our Lord, then an Infant of

forty days old, to Jerusalem to *present* Him to the Lord ; to shew Him there bodily in His human nature, as a true child of Abraham, to the God of Abraham. Or most especially, when the bride is presented and introduced to the bridegroom : as S. Paul says to the Corinthians, “^a I have espoused you to one husband, to *present* you as a chaste virgin to Christ :” and “Christ Himself loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might *present* the same Church in glory to Himself.” When will our Lord so present and introduce the Church to Himself? Not until she is all glorious, “^b without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.” And when will that be? Not until the last Day, when the new Jerusalem shall be drawn up to meet the Lord in the air, and to be for ever with Him ; when, the Spouse being made altogether ready, the marriage supper of the Lamb shall be fully come. Then, my brethren, in a wonderful mysterious way, as part of that great presentation, each faithful Bishop or pastor will have to present each one of his own flock, who has not broken away from him and from Christ : he will have to present him, to introduce him, face to face, to his Saviour. Yes, each pastor may say to his people, “I am to present you ; I and not another : you the very same persons, to whom I am now speaking, whom I am seeing with my eyes and looking upon, will have to meet me that day before the Throne ; we shall see one another, we shall know one another, we shall meet face to face, and we shall be conscious of the immediate bodily Presence of the Son of God on His Judgement seat. If through Him we are found

^a 2 Cor. xi. 2.^b Eph. v. 27.

worthy, I, even I myself, am to bring you, even you yourselves, to your several places on His gracious Right Hand." And to those who shall be able truly to take up His own word, and say, "Behold I, and the children whom God hath given me," He will say in a peculiar sense, "Well done, good and faithful one: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." For His joy is to save souls, and these souls have been saved through Him, by thee: thy joy therefore is so far all one with His.

Oh what a thought is this, my brethren, if we could once fully compass and realize it! A shepherd and pastor of souls, as it were a guardian Angel, standing before the Throne of Judgement with the souls that shall have been saved by his ministry: yes, and with the souls that shall have been lost also: for they, alas! will be there likewise. And then, what if they should be lost through our fault?

It is a serious thing, we know, when persons are to stand an examination for any place: whether it be this world's good which they seek, or a better; when a school or a college or any company of persons is inspected, and the best are to receive credit and rewards: when parents or teachers or sponsors or guardians bring their young people to be examined for Confirmation, it is, if persons rightly understand it, an anxious time, not only for the young people themselves, but for those also who have had them under training, and who must partly answer for it, if they are not sufficiently prepared. These, and such as these, are times of great anxiety in their way, of great joy or great sorrow, as they may turn out;

^c Heb. ii. 13.

but they are nothing at all, to what the guide and shepherd of souls will experience, when that final election, that last examination, shall take place, and he shall see some of his own, "perfect in Christ Jesus;" some, cast into outer darkness—not hear of it, but see it with his eyes. And take notice, brethren, that the Apostle says, *every man*; it is repeated three times in the verse in a very peculiar way: "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Therefore, brethren, you must not be affronted, nor think Christ's ministers troublesome, whoever you may be, to whom he comes with Christ's message, to teach or warn you, as need or occasion may be. Whoever you are, the Holy Ghost, you see, sends us with His message to you, to you in particular. If you are vexed and angry at being spoken to, it is not us, whom you are vexed and angry with, but God. Indeed you have much more reason to be affronted, when we pass you by, as too often happens, without warning. But when God's message is delivered to you, you know very well, without my telling you, how you ought to receive and take it, and how some of you do take it.

Neither, if you are wise, will you content yourselves with the notion, "The parson requires too much of me: he wants me to be perfect: but that is impossible: I need not mind what he says." It is true indeed, brethren, the parson does want you to be perfect. If he did not, he would be no true parson. For S. Paul, the pattern of parsons, as you heard, says, that his end, for which he was always

labouring, was "to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus;" and in another place, he says, "and this also we wish, even your perfection." So must we. Our end and aim must be your perfection. No less. Unless you think our Master would be pleased, or you made happy, by your being introduced to Him as a half-penitent, a wilful unbeliever and rebel in some things, while in others you had left off sin. This will never do, brethren. It will forfeit the blessing both of teachers and scholars; you cannot come to Christ at all in earnest, without intending to be perfect in Christ Jesus. *In Him*, mind that, brethren; in Him, by the time S. Paul speaks of, i. e. the general resurrection, all His faithful people will be perfect. Without Him, neither then nor now can they make even a beginning of true goodness.

This then is what we have to do, brethren, if we would make the right use of His exceeding grace in giving us regular ministers derived from the Apostles. We must cast ourselves on our gracious Saviour, both you and we your ministers, night and day, for grace to make much of that His unspeakable gift. Pray to Him, my brethren, with all your hearts, that He would never permit either us or you to forget that dreadful Day, near at hand, when we, the under shepherds, shall all stand before Him the chief Shepherd, to give an account of you, the sheep, one by one; and you too, one by one, will have to answer for your neglect or attention to our warnings. Pray to Him. It is not too late: pray to Him, and try to mend.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS.

S. MATT. XI. 6.

“Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.”

WHEN the Scripture uses the word “blessed” in this particular way, it seems to warn us, that there is some great danger at hand, to escape from which will be a rare and hard thing; so that they who shall escape will have reason to account themselves particularly well off. Thus in the second Psalm we read, “If the wrath of the Son of God be kindled, yea but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in Him :” i. e. it will be very bad for those who do not so. And again, “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching,” i. e. if He find them not watching, they are most unblessed. So our Saviour warned His disciples, “If ye know these things,” happy and “blessed are ye if ye do them,” which is much the same as if He had said, “Ye are but the more unhappy, except ye do them.” In the same way, we seem to be told here, that there was some great and peculiar danger, lest the persons, to whom our Lord was speaking, should find something in Him to offend them, that is, to make them stumble, and fall into sin. Now the

persons, to whom He was speaking, were two of S. John Baptist's disciples, whom S. John, being in prison, had sent to Christ to inquire whether He was really the great Deliverer Whom the world expected. Our Lord, according to His own saying, would not bear record of Himself, although, if He had, His record would have been true; but He bade the messengers take notice of the works which He did in His Father's Name, and see whether those works did not bear witness of Him. "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." These were all the very signs which Isaiah and the old Prophets had pointed out, whereby men might know the true Christ, when He came. To shew them even to men's very eyes, to be able to point to them and say, See the divine works which I am doing; this, one would have thought, was a sure way to make all persons believe. But our Lord speaks, as if it was quite the contrary: as if He had been a sort of stumbling-block before them. I do all these things, He says, "and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." As if He should say, "It will be well for you if you are not offended, if you do not stumble at My doctrine: for the greater part of the world will do so. I have given you My Father's tokens; if you really mind and believe them, it will be a rare happiness."

Now it is not hard to understand, how the greater part should have been unbelieving at the beginning of the Gospel. It was what S. Paul calls the offence

of the Cross. As long as men knew only of the miracles, they were content to have the benefit of them, and to believe so far as this, that our Lord was in some manner sent to do them good. But when they found that this same Jesus, Who had saved others, did not save Himself from death, and that, the most cruel and shameful death; and that they, if they believed in Him, must be ready for many and great sufferings, then of course they were offended, and drew back from Him. Our Lord was always very careful to warn men beforehand that so it would be; and He did so on this occasion. For it was His will, that none should be tempted by His miracles to join Him, without knowing what trouble and danger he was bringing on himself in this world. He would have people sit down first and count the cost.

But, how stands the case now, my brethren? how is it among ourselves? We who have no call, generally speaking, outwardly and in the sight of men, to take up our Baptismal Cross, and follow Him, forsaking all that we have: are we therefore under no temptation at all to unbelief? I mean, besides the common and ordinary sins, which people too easily find excuses for committing in spite of their faith, is there not reason to fear that many are even tempted to give up their faith itself, and to talk and think as scorners and unbelievers, when they think they can freely take their own way? Assuredly Scripture seems to forewarn us of such a danger. It speaks of "an evil heart of unbelief," which we are all to take heed of. Our Lord says, "^a When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the

^a S. Luke xviii. 8.

earth?" as though the older the world grew, and the more customary it became for all men everywhere to profess and call themselves Christians, the more they would fall from Him in their hearts. S. Paul speaks of a time, when the common course of things would be, for persons to profess that they know God, while by their works they deny Him; and he seems in a manner to pant and labour after words, to express his sense of the greatness of their sin and danger. They are "abominable," he says, "disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." They are the hypocrites, of whom our Lord and Judge uttered so many severe sentences, saying, "Woe," unto them, eight times in one discourse, when He was preparing to go finally out of man's sight. And in all His discourses almost, He speaks of them: giving us to understand, that they will never cease out of the Church. There will always be some like the scornors in Noah's time, to scoff at the building of the ark; like Pharaoh, to say in their hearts, "Who is the Lord? I know Him not, neither will I keep His commandments." It is a sort of people, to go on from generation to generation, until the last Day shall dawn, and the last fire begin to burn, and try our words and our works, of what sort they are.

Certainly at this present time, and in this country of England, we have no particular reason to think, that this sin of scornful unbelief is very uncommon. Consider. Every one almost now learns to read, and who is to keep them right in their readings? Who is to keep their eyes from dwelling upon some of the many profane books and newspapers, which the servants of the Evil one are continually throwing in

their way? It is scarcely possible for those who read indiscriminately, that is, who read without scruple every thing that comes in their way, not to be more or less of unbelievers, except they be very specially guarded by some good providence of God.

In the next place, what was it in our Saviour's own time, which made the greater part of the Jewish people, and of the Gentiles too, mere unbelievers? I have before answered this: It was the offence of the Cross. They were told plainly, that they must suffer with Him, and deny themselves; and this they could not endure, and now they are still told the same; for it is the truth of God and of Christ, and cannot change. We are still told, all of us, that in order to continue Christ's own people, we must renounce the world and the flesh, we must crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts; we must "keep under the body and bring it into subjection;" we must fast, when we would fain be enjoying ourselves, and pray when we want to be busy with earthly things. The Gospel says to us, as it said to its first converts, "you have appetites, but you must not indulge them; you have strong desires, to be conquered, not to be satisfied; you have around you bewitching sights and sounds, but you must not look nor listen, or you will surely die." If you have not the heart to obey these warnings, and yet cannot help knowing of them, how easy it is for the devil to suggest to you, that perhaps "they were not real warnings, real messages from above; perhaps there is some great mistake and the Christian religion is not right after all;" and then he will put the difficulties and objections, of which there

are abundance, to try our faith, these he will put strongly before your eyes, flattering you inwardly at the same time with some vain notion of your own wisdom; and so you, who began perhaps simply as a wilful self-pleasing child, will end as a confirmed unbeliever.

The mere indulgence of bodily appetites has a great tendency that way: and still more perhaps the proud sullen spirit, which seems to be in an especial manner the stumbling-block and curse of this our native country of England. We are proud of holding ourselves up, of leaning on ourselves, of judging for ourselves, of being manly, free, independent. But if there be any truth in the Creed of the Apostles, all this freedom and independence is quite out of place in a Christian. He is not his own: he is bought with a price; and has to measure all his doings and sufferings by the good pleasure of Another. It is a point of faith in him to believe, that he cannot stand a moment by himself; that he is a member of a great society, the Church of God, whose rules he must needs obey, or lose his all: that he is bound especially to submit himself to those whom Christ has set over him, as his pastors; to obey them, because they watch for his soul. Now how can a proud wilful person like all this? Surely he will be greatly tempted to despise and disbelieve the Book which contains it all, and the holy Church which teaches it. He will say in his heart, "Tush, the Lord will not see; tush, Thou God carest not for it." He will turn unbeliever, because he hates what he sees to be a believer's duty.

Further: if at all times the haughty and the sen-

sual man are especially open to this temptation, surely now, and in this land, as much or more than in any other place or time. For now, of late years especially, all sorts of contrivances for enjoying life, and making it outwardly and bodily more comfortable, have come to be more and more within many people's reach: and the freer they are to indulge themselves, the greater the enticement to reject the Gospel on account of its self-denying doctrines. Again, of late years, a great deal has been done and said, to cherish in men the notion of being free and independent. Each one thinks himself fit to be his own master, and is more or less displeased, when obedience, especially when obedience to pastors, is enforced as a duty. I fear we cannot much doubt, that many a man is at heart an unbeliever, because he cannot bear to submit himself. His common sense tells him, that if the Gospel be true, he ought to put himself under the direction of those, to whom Christ has intrusted it; and this is so contrary to our natural pride, that it seems to many of us worse than death, and so it ends in our making up our minds, that after all the Gospel is not so very true. Some of it is true, and good; but not that particular part, which goes so against our sense of our own dignity; and when the Evil one has thus persuaded you to deny one part of the holy baptismal Creed, he will soon go on, and get you to question it all, and to live regardless of it, as if at least it signified little whether it were true, or false. I wish experienced thoughtful persons would consider, whether this be not a true account of the ordinary course of those, who, because they are affronted with their

pastor, and will not give way to his judgement, either forsake Church assemblies, or come to them with a scornful unbelieving mind.

And there is one thing more, which hurts them very much, and greatly hinders their repentance, when through God's grace they begin to be that way disposed: I mean, the ridicule of bad or foolish companions. Miserable as it is to think of, yet it is most true, that Christians not seldom permit themselves to be laughed out of their portion in Christ. Immortal souls to be laughed out of their everlasting life! Persons, I say, permit this, who would know far better than to give up any worldly good for the same senseless reason. If a handful of money were given you, you would not throw it away, should you be ridiculed for your manner of carrying it home. If you had received a cure from a painful disease, you would not cast away the blessing, or leave off caring for your health, because somebody found something to laugh at, or speak unkindly of. Yet thus it is with you: you have been baptized and confirmed, and have vowed and sworn to keep Christ's holy will, and you know it is Christ's will that you should do this in remembrance of Him: and yet you will not do this. Why? For fear of being pointed at, and mocked at as something particular. That is all. You will not be hurt in your life, body, estate or character: you will be only just laughed at, and scorned a little: and for fear of this, you keep away from Christ, and forfeit your part and lot in Him, disobeying His farewell command. But He did not come down from the Cross, when He was scorned and mocked for you. Think you, that it was no grief to Him, when they taunted

Him by word and deed; when they came to Him, offering vinegar for His thirst; when they blasphemously said concerning His Father; "Let Him deliver Him, if He will have Him." Christ drew back from none of all this: He bore it (for so He willed) from beginning to end: He did not flinch from saving you, because of it. But you, for a very little laughter, grow ashamed of honouring Christ. O, think better of it. Can you not find it in your heart to be even glad and thankful, that you have a chance of giving up some little, some very little thing to Him Who grudged you nothing? Ought you not heartily to lay hold of the hem of His garment, thus held out to you, in love to Him, and in hope of a greater blessing? The first Christians, who were beaten for His sake, the blessed Apostles, "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name," and went on the more courageously, ceasing not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. It will be a good and happy hour for you, when you make up your mind in like manner. But why are you losing time about it? Do you not know, *who* rejoices, when he hears you talk of putting off right things till to-morrow? Do you not know, what road it is, which, as a wise and good man said, is in a manner paved with good intentions? O, be wise in time; be beforehand with the Evil one: he wants to make you an unbeliever, by prevailing on you to slight the Holy Communion: do you, by God's help, make yourself a firm believer, by coming early to it, and continuing steadily.

To conclude: let us all by God's grace seriously consider, what a miserable thing it must be, to turn

the very coming of the Lord Jesus Christ which was intended for us men and for our salvation, into an occasion of deeper sin ; the deadly and grievous sin of unbelief. Or again to turn His blessed Sacrament, the ordained means whereby He communicates to us Himself, and all the benefits of His Passion, into an occasion of slighting and disobeying Him. There was an old proverb which said, “ If water choke a man, what is he to drink ? ” So may we say to ourselves, “ If the coming of Christ, and His altar, are turned by me into sin, what can I look for but utter ruin ? ” There is but one thing to be compared with the misery of an unbelieving Christian, and that is the happiness of a believing and obedient one.

SERMON XXXVII.

OUR LORD AMONG US, THOUGH WE KNOW HIM NOT.

S. JOHN i. 26.

“There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not.”

IN one sense, as you well know, Christ and His kingdom are not yet come; the trial of the world and of the Church is not yet over; the world is not yet judged, nor the saints delivered; we are not yet in heaven, nor in hell; but God keeps us yet awhile upon earth, to see whether we will repent and amend, or no; and our brethren departed He keeps either in Paradise, or in their sad prisons of darkness, apart from their bodies until the time of the end come. And in this sense we pray continually, that His kingdom may come, and holy men, like S. Paul, have desired to depart, and to be with Christ, and we read that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.

But in another sense the kingdom is come already, and Christ is even now among us: we are come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new Covenant, and He never can for a moment leave us, nor forsake us. Thus the preaching of the Church even now is, that Jesus Christ is both present and to come. He is with us, as a God Who hideth Himself; but, before long,

He will so come that all will see Him. The veil will be taken away, and we shall wonder, that we have all our lives dwelt so near to that brightest glory, and have never yet discerned it.

Like to this double preaching of the Church, was the preaching of S. John the Baptist, the type and shadow of the Church's ministry. He too spoke of our Lord, as not yet come. "One mightier than I cometh." "He cometh," I do not say He is yet come: and "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand:" it is not set up in the world, it is only very near. But in another sense he pointed to our Lord as being already come: as the bright morning star shews whereabout the sun is, before he has quite risen upon the earth. That is, our Lord was come in Presence, but not in open sight, not so as to put forth His power. And of this coming the Holy Baptist bore witness in the verses appointed for the Gospel of this fourth Sunday in Advent: "There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not:" even as, just after, he spake of His future coming in power, and setting up His Kingdom on the Day of Pentecost: "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

We may well imagine, what a stir it must have made among the multitudes who heard S. John speak, when he uttered such words unto them. "There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not." We may fancy how they looked round, one upon another, doubting of whom he spake; how some of them watched S. John's eye and the turn of his countenance, to see whether he looked towards any one in particular. They perhaps were expecting that S. John would declare himself to be the Christ: we know that some

of them had been in expectation, "musing in their hearts concerning John, whether he were the Christ or not." And when he told them it was not he, they might naturally suppose that it was some one, even more remarkable in his outside appearance than S. John was, more poorly clad, more worn with watchings and fastings; or on the other hand, one more noble and glorious, carrying all before Him by the brightness and power of His appearing. Something of this sort no doubt was their expectation; and it must have sounded very strange to them, when he said, He standeth already among you: ye know Him not, but I know Him: He is come from heaven, He is here on earth, He is in this country, nay more, He is even now in this company. There He is, standing bodily among you, little thought or dreamed of by you. No doubt, when they heard this, many thoughts arose in their hearts: but few if any, came at all near the truth. Few, if any, could discern, which of that crowd was God Almighty present on earth. Some might look among the Chief Priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, those who seemed to be most learned, most depended on for their knowledge of Holy Scripture. Others might look among the rich and great ones, Herod's nobles, if there were any there, or the chief of the soldiers, who listened to S. John. But all the while there was in the multitude a poor humble quiet young Man, supposed to be a carpenter's son; of Nazareth, a place of no great credit: Who had lived now thirty years, working at the carpenter's trade, going about the village like any other poor but respectable artisan. When people met Him, they saw nothing particular in Him: no form nor comeliness, no

beauty nor glory, that they should desire Him. He was very likely one of the last persons in the crowd around S. John, towards whom the generality would have turned their eyes, thinking, What if this should be He? What if this Jesus of Nazareth should prove to be the very Christ? And yet He was so, and no other. The poor young carpenter, so mean in outward appearance, was the Christ; the very Christ, the Son of God, begotten from everlasting of the Father; the only Sacrifice for the sins of the world, the King and God of the whole creation, the Judge, both of quick and dead. He, of Whom all this is true, was in that company, but they knew Him not. He was in the crowd; He was close to some of them; very likely they thronged and pressed Him, but they knew Him not. Some of them might know something about Him: for example, if there were any there from Nazareth, they would know Him to be the person, whom they called the "carpenter's son." Some few of them might have the same kind of knowledge of Him, as S. John seems to have had, before he baptised Him. The Baptist must have known our Lord from the beginning as a very very Holy Person. He must have heard what the shepherds had said of Him; yet he says, "I knew Him not: but when I saw the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God." He knew not Christ's full glory, until the Holy Ghost had descended upon Him. Those among the crowd who knew most of Jesus could not well know more than S. John knew, before he baptised Him: and S. John himself says; At that time "I knew Him not." Well, therefore, might he say to the multitudes, "There

standeth One among you, Whom ye know not." Those among you, who know most of Him, account Him only a very holy Man, raised up for some very great and gracious purpose : but in truth, He is the most high God, God Incarnate, God the Son come down from heaven and made Man, to die for us. There He stands in the midst of you, but ye know Him not.

Thus it was when the Baptist spake; and it was the same all along, in all the stages of our Saviour's life on earth. Whether He was among friends or enemies, or indifferent persons, He was not fully known : and when He had died and risen again, and His Holy Spirit had made Him known, as the true God, to all believers, He could no longer be seen. He was gone away into heaven. Always, and in every case, He was "a God, Who hideth Himself."

If it were so then, my brethren, be sure it is so now. It is still exactly and literally true, in respect of every assembly of Christian people, few or many, whether they be come together for good or for evil, for business or diversion ; "There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not." Jesus Christ is always among us, to watch both over good and over evil, both over business and over diversion. We do not see Him, we only see one another, but He is not the less certainly among us. If we disobey Him, we disobey Him to His Face; if we affront Him, we affront Him to His Face; if we forget Him, yet He is close at hand, listening to every word we say, and noting all down in His awful Book. Let us turn this over in our minds; let us go on thinking of it, until we have got it well fixed in our hearts : so that, whatever

company we go into, we may always remember that Christ is one of that company.

For example, here we are now, in Church; and we see a certain number of our friends and neighbours around us. We see them, but we do not see Christ: yet we know that Christ is here: for it is His own promise, and we have been told of it over and over; "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ is here in the midst of us, but we know Him not; not even those among us, who most earnestly desire and labour to behave well, not even the most devout of His worshippers can thoroughly know Him, He is so unspeakably high, holy and pure. How much less can the ordinary sort, those who in general are but outwardly well-behaved. How can they be said to know Him? And least of all is He known to the profane and wilfully inattentive. Yet is He among us all. In one corner of a Church perhaps are some young people, inclined to behave rudely, and fancying that they have found a place where nobody can see them: there they imagine they may amuse themselves at their leisure. Take care, my young friends; Christ is even now close to you, He is in that corner of the Church, as well as anywhere else: there is no whisper so secret, no sign or token of folly so slight and unnoticeable, but He comes between those among whom it passes, hears the whisper, sees the glance or the movement. Take care, your Lord hears and sees all. Elsewhere perhaps, in the same Church, is some quiet person, young or old, with but few of his own house or near friends to encourage him in coming there; there is no one, it may be, at hand, at all near

or dear to him, to whom he can look for encouragement and sympathy in his devotion. Let this man again remember that *He* is standing among us, Who is more than all fathers and children, wives and husbands, friends and neighbours, Who has taught His true servants to say, "When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up," and therefore such an one may humbly cheer himself with the thought, that Christ at least is present to say Amen to his prayers: and if Christ be there, surely he need not feel desolate: if Christ say Amen, surely the prayer falls not to the ground.

Above all things, when the memorial Sacrifice of Christ, when His Sacrament of Holy Communion comes on; when you leave your place and come into the chancel, to kneel down, and partake of that saving Body and Blood, let all endeavour to feel in their very hearts, that *here* above all other places on earth, our Lord Jesus, God and Man, is present in a peculiar manner. As to those who come worthily, He is present with such grace as is promised to nothing else that is done here below: For they do verily and indeed eat His Flesh and drink His Blood: they dwell in Him, and He in them: they are one with Him, and He with them: so the Holy Scripture teaches, that they who come unworthily find Him also present in such sense as that they are guilty of His Body and Blood. Their sin is the same, as if they had gone by whilst Joseph was laying Him in the grave, and had insulted His Blessed Body. Therefore to all careless communicants the Church seems to cry aloud; "There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not:" take care how you deal

with Him. For He comes, longing to dwell in your hearts, He cannot bear to be neglected; much less to be affronted and reproachfully used. And to all penitent, but sad and dejected communicants, she still utters the same words; "There standeth One among you," yea, there abideth in the midst of you, even in the very deep of your heart there abideth, One Whom ye know not. The God of all comfort is there, though as yet you taste not His comfort: but wait on Him in loving obedience, and all will be right.

Now we will suppose that the Holy Sacrament is over, and the Christian people are gone home to their houses; you are gathered together, families, fellow-servants, friends or neighbours, for innocent and loving conversation, and refreshment. It is well. This also is God's blessing; but take good heed, I beseech you, that in these your home-gatherings, as well as in your solemn assemblies, there is always present One more than your eyes can see; Christ is there, though you see Him not. He expects you to turn towards Him, and give Him thanks, at the beginning of the meals which He allows you. He expects you, during the meal, to recollect that He is there: and as you would not act rudely and unmannerly, if you were at a great man's table, at a feast, where a king was present, so Christ expects of you to be sober and temperate, out of true reverence to Him, and to guard your tongue from scandal and backbiting especially, because He is there, setting down every word. Keep these rules, my brethren: behave at your common meals and meetings for diversion, as persons who do not forget that they carry

Christ about with them, having received Him in His holy Sacrament : and a great blessing will attend you, even on those ordinary occasions. You will not be the less cheerful, but your cheerfulness will be far more innocent and happy.

Next, imagine, the Sunday over, the time of rest and refreshment at an end, and that you are gathered together for some purpose of worldly business; at market, for instance, or in a shop, or working together in any manner: here again the saying will be true, "There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not." He Who once spake from Heaven in thunder, "Thou shalt not steal;" He Who cannot bear any manner of cheating, fraud, injustice, or wrong; He is with the tradesman behind the counter, with the dealer in the fair or market, with the thresher in the barn, with the servant in the storehouse or garden. He knows all the liberties we ever take, either in helping ourselves secretly, or in bargaining unfairly to our own advantage. He knows all the falsehoods men tell in such matters, all the grudging and envious thoughts, the bitter and angry words, to which they are tempted. He knows when the hired labourer neglects his due portion of work, as well as He knows when the employer under-pays him, or grudges him his just wages in proper time. In all such temptations, (and most of us at times are exposed to one or another of them,) the great safeguard is to be aware of His Eye fixed upon us. If we knew that some Saint, some very holy person was watching us, should we not think a good deal of it? Would it not make a great difference in our conduct? How much more, when He standeth among us invisibly, Who is the

Lord of all Saints ! How pure should we strive to be, in sight of the God of purity.

Indeed, my brethren, the thought of His so standing among us would be too awful if really considered ; it would be too much for us, it could not be borne ; were it not that He has graciously told us, how good and forgiving He is also. We should surely die, upon thus seeing God, were it not that it is the same God Who made Himself Man for our sake, the same Christ Who died for us. But then we must be making much both of His Birth and of His Death, not neglecting them, or making them void. Christmas, like other holy Seasons, is given us for our trial in this respect. May we so keep it, this time at least, that it may not tell to our condemnation.

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE GUIDING VOICE.

ISA. xxx. 21.

*“Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying ;
This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the
right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”*

THE kingdom of heaven has no promise of freedom from trouble and adversity, pain and sickness, in this world, but rather, on the contrary, we are taught to expect it. You all know, how expressly our Saviour spoke of taking up the cross, and what grievous suffering His first disciples had to endure. But at the same time He promised them, that although their way was rough, it would be plain. The Holy Spirit was to come, and teach them, and guide them into all truth. They that follow Him, were not to walk in darkness, but to have the light of life.

Now, both these tokens of the true Gospel, trouble in this world, yet the road to a better world made plain, are clearly set down in that chapter of Isaiah, from which the text is taken ; and which is ordained to be read as our first lesson this morning. First, we have the warning, that trouble was to be expected. “The Lord will give unto thee the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction.” The Jews had a land flowing

with milk and honey, all sorts of temporal prosperity, to encourage their obedience. The Christian people not so: they have indeed the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come; but in the way of comfort and inward support, not in the way of plenty and outward enjoyment. It is not so with the other promise, that of spiritual light and guidance: *that* is clearly and positively given. "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying; This is the way, walk ye in it: when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." The meaning seems to be much the same, as when it is promised in the Epistle to the Hebrews; "^aI will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and they shall not teach, every man his brother and every man his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord." Which promise, S. Paul mentions out of the Prophet Jeremiah, to shew, that one great mark of the Gospel times, would be the gift of the Holy Spirit, teaching Christians all their duty: and not only teaching them in the first place, but warning them continually afterwards. So that, whenever we are going materially wrong, there should be something within or without, to tell us that we *are* wrong.

Our Lord, we know, more than once tells us of a narrow way, along which we must carefully walk, if we hope to come to Him at last. Imagine your-

^a Heb. viii. 10, 11.

self walking along this way, and tempted by some pleasant sight or sound to turn out of it, at least for a while, either to the right hand or to the left. Here is a promise that, in such a case, you will hear a voice behind you, a voice from an invisible being, from the unseen world, and therefore said to be behind you, inasmuch as the person who speaks is out of sight. What will this voice say? "This is the way; walk ye in it." This is the one path of duty; this is the way of Christ, and His saints: walk ye in it; turn not aside, or if ye have unhappily turned, make haste and get back into this way again. It is your only chance, your only hope. Every way but this one will take you sooner or later into the broad way, that leads to destruction. Such is the warning promised in the Holy Scriptures to us Christians, as often as we are tempted to go wrong. The Holy Spirit, our eternal, unfailing Friend, poured into our hearts at holy Baptism, He will not let us have our own bad way, without warning us by His godly motions, that it *is* a bad way. This is God's merciful care of us, that we might not throw away His infinite blessings, so freely given, before we could know or do anything. In Him, it is most infinite mercy; but it makes our condition a very awful and serious one. For do we not all feel that for a person to go wrong is so much the more frightful, as he knew, or might have known better? When children or others are punished severely, is it not always on this ground, that they very well knew they were doing wrong, they did it in spite of being told; they were well aware of the consequence? As we deal with those under our

charge, so God will deal with us. “^bThe servant which knew his Master’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.” It is the true Judge Himself Who says this; and, O my brethren, what a fearful saying it is! How deeply are we concerned, one and all of us, to think of it in good time, that we may either, through His great mercy, avoid His scourge altogether, or at least prevail upon Him to punish us for a time, and not turn away His face, as we have deserved, for ever. Let us think on the many warnings we have received from our youth up until now; and how we have dealt with these warnings. From the very beginning, we have had conscience whispering in our hearts: ever since the time when we first understood, that we ought to do as our parents would have us. Every warning from our parents was a warning from God: not only their words, but their looks and actions, their eyes earnestly turned towards us when we were taking wrong liberties, the mere shaking of the head, or beckoning with the hand, all that we noticed, of that sort, or ought to have noticed, was a real message from Him Who will come to be our Judge; all was set down in His Book; all will be to be accounted for, when that Book shall be opened. Then our parents committed us to teachers, and from either, or both, we learned rules of holy and good living: the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the ten Commandments, with many other things, which in our hearts we knew, and felt to be

^b S. Luke xii. 47, 48.

our duty, were by degrees taught us ; our conscience received them ; we knew, and felt without any doubting, that such and such things we must do, if we would do the will of God, and such and such things we must leave undone. And still as years went on these warnings multiplied upon us : we were taught to read, and good books were put in our hands, more especially God's own Book ; and as we read, we could not help now and then feeling how this or that verse, which we came to, suited exactly our own case. We read of certain sins committed, and it flashed like lightning upon our minds, Thou art the man : we read of certain duties well done, and we could not help being aware that God had called us to the same : we read of certain cautions against temptation and danger, and were aware at the bottom of our hearts, that those very temptations and dangers were our own. And, besides our private reading, which of us has not before now heard things said in Church, in sermons or in lessons, which came home to him at the time, and touched him to the quick, so that he almost thought the preacher or reader must have been thinking of and looking at him ? And indeed though the minister was not, yet God was then looking directly upon us, and seeking to make us, as it were, catch His eye : much in the same way as anxious parents take pains to catch the eye of their children, when they want to give them a hint that may be good for them. Sometimes, the warning has been yet more pointed and expressed. When we were behaving like lost sheep, going more and more astray, the shepherd has come following after us, the messenger of Christ has

overtaken us, with his fatherly caution or rebuke; we perhaps received it ungraciously, but was there not something at the time, is there not something now in our hearts, telling us that this was indeed a voice from Heaven, and that, in despising it, we were despising Jesus Christ?

And besides all these, we have had God's providential warnings in the judgements which have befallen either ourselves, or others in our sight. How often have we seen others suffering for sins like our own, only perhaps far lighter! And can we doubt of this being God's threatening to ourselves? How often have distress and anguish come upon us in some slight measure, such as we could, without any manner of question, trace to some of our old or present sins? This surely was the Lord's right-hand put forth from behind the cloud; if we humbled ourselves beneath it, it was well: if we scorned it at the time, yet now at least, let us acknowledge it.

Moreover, God has warned us again and again by the good examples which He has thrown in our way: and indeed by all the sayings and doings, which we have heard and seen to be according to His holy will, whether the persons were, in a general way, such as He would approve or no. Nay, must we not with shame confess that many many times, persons, whom we in our self-conceit would have looked upon as far inferior to ourselves, have rebuked us without knowing it, by shewing that they watched against some sin which we indulged, or practised some virtue which we neglected? If ever our hearts smite us with the consciousness of any such thing as this, let us humbly and thankfully take it as a lesson of

contrition from Him, Who really sends it. Let us watch, not like the Pharisee, to indulge vain dreams of our being better than others; but rather to find out the good which there plainly is, even in the worst of those who fall in our way, and to rebuke ourselves by comparison with it: as our Lord rebuked our sloth by comparison with the diligence of the unjust steward.

One might go on for a long time giving instances: but enough surely has been now said, to remind any one of us who has lived any time in the world, how full his whole life has been of warnings from above. Nor let not shrink from the question, though it might well break some of our hearts: "How have we regarded these warnings? Have they in any sort done their work upon us, the work which God intended them to do? Have we not, more than once, overridden them as it were, trampled them down, though they lay full in our way, and gone on sinning with a high and scornful hand? Have we not, still oftener perhaps, passed them by on purpose, with a sort of half-consciousness, aware that God was speaking to us, yet, somehow or other, making up our minds that, for that time at least, we would not listen? Have we not weakly and wilfully deceived ourselves by putting off our attention to them, as Felix to S. Paul, to a more convenient season? Have we not sometimes said to ourselves: This is accident, it is no special message of providence to me: or, this text has some other meaning, it does not belong to my case: or, this man's example is no rule for me: his case is not like mine; I need not be so much ashamed, though I have fallen into sins, which he has

overcome?" In such ways, I fear, we have too often put away from us plain warnings of our heavenly Friend; the same warnings perhaps over and over; so often that we cannot now remember them; yet let us try to be sorry for them; He will accept our hearty sorrow and amendment, and will blot it all out of His Book.

Here, my brethren, is our only comfort: God has not yet made it too late for us to repent; else, why are we now here? Why are we not in the place where no repentance can come? God be thanked, it is not too late. Instead of having entered on a miserable eternity, He permits us to be still here on our trial. We have indeed, many of us, greatly abused His goodness; we have despised His warnings, or, if we regarded them, it was but for a short time. When the alarm or anguish had gone by, too often we returned to our old bad or careless ways; yet He bears with us, He has allowed us to enter on another Christmas week, one more of those serious yet comfortable times, in which He especially invites to Himself all that are weary and heavy laden; He invites them first to put away their sins by repentance, and then to receive, on His own sacred Birthday, the sovereign medicine of His own Body and Blood. Past sins indeed cannot be undone, lost time cannot be recalled. Warnings unattended to may be gone for ever from our memory; but let us strive in earnest to bring Him the sacrifice which He loves, a broken and a contrite heart, and we may be sure He will not despise it. He will by degrees, in His own time and way, help us to perfect our repentance; His good Spirit will answer our prayers,

making us more and more contrite for warnings forgotten, or thrown away; more and more attentive to all the hints inward and outward, which He now vouchsafes to give us. By degrees He will help us into a way of watching for and observing His godly motions, and not letting them pass unimproved: and who can express the depth of that satisfaction, which He pours into the heart of a penitent, when, through his tears as one may say, he discerns somewhat of his Lord's countenance, full of awe, yet unspeakably encouraging, when he marks and obeys the godly motions within him?

And if God's warnings, thus attended to, bring such comfort here, think how much more blessing and comfort they will prove to a good Christian hereafter, how they will return to such an one now on the edge of the grave, as so many tokens of God's merciful purpose towards him; how, when the Books are opened at the Last Great Day, these warnings improved will be found written in his favour, will shew that he had not cut himself off from Christ. How, even to everlasting glory, the memory of these warnings will accompany him, and will help him through a happy eternity, to admire God's unspeakable goodness, in not letting us perish.

God grant it to be so with us, though our deserts be far otherwise, for His Son's sake, Who was made Man and died for us, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

SERMON XXXIX.

THE COMING OF OUR LORD, A MOTIVE FOR CHRISTIAN GENTLENESS.

PHIL. iv. 5.

“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.”

THE word “moderation,” we know, has different meanings. Sometimes it tells us that the persons spoken of are, as we say, moderate in eating and drinking and in other refreshments of the body; that they are very careful not to indulge themselves too far. Sometimes again we hear it used in common talk, or read of it in books, as being that, by which people are moderate in their likings and dislikes, neither blaming nor praising any thing, neither hating nor loving any body, too much. Thus in one sense we call a man a moderate man, when we see that his way is to keep himself in order, not indulge excessively in any of his pleasures: and, in another sense, we call him a moderate man, when he is not so very violent in favour of some men and against others. It is in this latter sense, that the word “moderation” is used here by S. Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians. It is the same meaning as gentleness. As, when he speaks of the meekness and gentleness of Christ: and says, that we must be no brawlers, but gentle: and

that the wisdom, which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable and gentle. S. Peter too, in the very same meaning, enjoins servants to be dutiful and obedient not only to "the good and gentle, but also to the froward." In all these places gentle and moderate mean much the same thing; that we, as Christians, Christ's servants and members, should be always ready to judge kindly of others; always to speak kindly to them and of them, and to put ourselves in their place, let them be never so provoking. This is the temper and tone of mind, which the holy Apostle recommends in other places to the clergy, and here to all Christians generally. "Let your moderation," your gentleness, your candid and considerate ways, "be known unto all men."

But here a difficulty arises. How can it be right to let this our "moderation," our good and gentle way, be known unto all men, seeing our Lord Himself has so earnestly commanded us to hide from man what we do in the way of goodness, as much as ever we can, without interfering with other duties? For His word is, "^a when thou doest alms, let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth:" "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet;" "when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, who disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast." "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret;" and He gives us to understand, that if we have our reward here in the praise of men, we have no reward of our Father which is in Heaven.

^a S. Matt. vi. 3.

All this He says to us in His holy Sermon on the mount. And yet in the very same Sermon He had before said ; “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.” How may these sayings agree? Very easily, brethren, if we will take notice that in the one He speaks to the whole Church : “*your* light and *your* good works ;” what belongs to you all as a *Body* ; and in the other He speaks to each particular person among us ; “*thine* alms, *thy* left hand and *thy* right hand.” And again, in the one place, he speaks of each particular person’s intention and desire in doing good : in the other, He speaks of that which follows and takes place of itself, without such intention and desire. “Let thine alms be in secret ;” that is to be each person’s wish and desire. He is really to wish and to pray in his heart, that the good that he does for God’s sake may be known to none but God. “But let the Church’s light shine before men,” that is, our Lord willeth all the doings of His people to be so done according to His will, that, without any such thought or purpose of their’s, the Church may shine very brightly, and all nations, beholding, may hasten and flow in unto it : and so, not any particular Christian, but the God of the whole Church, our Father Who is in heaven may be glorified.

In this sense, then, we may easily understand, how S. Paul, speaking to all the Philippians and through them to all of us Christians, should say, “let your moderation be known unto all men.” I would have every single one among you so patient and gentle, so quiet and considerate in his ways, that, without your thinking of it, all men beholding it should say,

“Surely this Christian Faith, this Church of Jesus of Nazareth, must have in it some great power to do men good, to improve their hearts and behaviour, to make them peaceable, gentle, loving, useful, beyond all other ways that have yet been tried. Surely the Lord is among them, else they could not go on in such divine and heavenly charity.” In this way, S. Paul would have our “moderation be known unto all men:” not that thou shouldest strive to be moderate and keep thyself in order, that men may praise thee and call thee good-tempered, but that we all, one with another, should bear such fruits of love, that men beholding it, shall say, “God is among them of a truth.”

Thus I have tried to shew you, what the Apostle means by “moderation,” and in what sense he says, “Let it be known unto all men.” Now let us go on to the reason or argument, which the Apostle alleges to encourage us in that duty; “The Lord is at hand.” Christ is very near us, although He is as yet out of sight. That is one reason, why we should be very moderate, very gentle, very considerate in our talk and in our judgements of one another. If you were among a family of children, the children of some good and great man, on whom you greatly depended, and knew that he, the father of the family, was watching and listening somewhere out of sight, would it not make you very careful, how you dealt with those children, what sort of words you said to them, how you governed your temper whilst you were with them? Well! there you are in the midst of the family of the great King and Father, Who holds your souls and bodies for all eternity in His hand, and He

is listening and watching, how you behave to His beloved sons and daughters, whether you are rude and cross to them, or mild and gentle; whether you speak bad words or good words in their hearing; whether your conversation is such as to tempt them to sin or to keep them from it. Do you then be careful so to speak, as one who knows that the Lord is listening. Imagine Him turning and looking upon you, as He did once on S. Peter, and check yourself from time to time, when conscience tells you, that if you could now see Him, surely His look would be a reproving look. Be greatly afraid of any rude behaviour, any liberties taken with the little ones of His flock. Think how frightful it would be, should He suddenly appear from behind His cloud, and say to you, "How darest thou so to treat those whom I have made innocent, and taken to be Mine own? They are My lambs. I have taken them up in Mine arms. O beware of the dreadful guilt of tempting them to cast themselves away from Me."

Again this saying, "The Lord is at hand," is most properly an Advent saying, it means, "The cloud will soon be withdrawn, the gates of heaven will again be thrown open, and Christ, the Son of God, will come according to His promise. He will come, by God's great long-suffering, on this Christmas, as in former seasons of Christmas. As the preaching of S. John Baptist prepared the way for the first Coming of our Lord, so these days of Advent, returning yearly, prepare the way for our keeping the memory of that first Coming on Christmas Day. On that day He came to save us; came to save the very worst and most provoking of those whom we have to deal with.

What right has any one of us to give way to angry feelings, to be scornful, spiteful, rude, uncourteous, haughty, towards any one else, the meanest and most ignorant of our brethren, seeing that He, Whom all the Angels worship, did not think scorn to be born in a manger, and afterwards to die on a Cross for that very person? O let it not seem strange to us at least to command ourselves, and to give him a friendly answer with meekness.

But once more: "The Lord is at hand," not only to save us at Christmas, but also to judge us at the last Day. Hour by hour, minute by minute, the great and terrible moment is drawing on, in which the heaven which is on high shall be opened, and He will come forth visibly and bodily, Whom the whole world is expecting: all but a few desperate unbelievers. He will come and sit upon His throne: this lower heaven and earth, the heaven and the earth that now is, will vanish from underneath His Feet: and we shall stand before Him to be judged.

We shall all stand before the judgement-seat of Christ. Therefore, says S. Paul, "why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?" Why art thou sharp in finding out thy neighbour's transgressions, and making out the worst of him, seeing that thou art thyself so very soon to give account of thine own innumerable faults? "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged." Be not hasty, be not rash with thy mouth in passing sentence on thy brother's doings, and then thou mayest hope that the dreadful sentence will not be passed on thee. Be not hasty to condemn, or to make out the worst, either with thy mouth or with thine heart. Even in

thine inward, thy silent, thoughts, be slow to impute bad meanings to another. They will suggest themselves too commonly, readily enough : they will come into thy mind ; but do not thou encourage or give way to them. Treat them as thou wouldest other bad and improper fancies : dismiss them, turn them out of thy mind, leave them off before they be meddled with. Consider, my brethren, how little, how very little, we really know of each other ; there is One only that can read our hearts. What is done, we see ; but why it is done, or with what intent, we can seldom or never know for certain. Neither, when we are sure it is amiss, can we know how great the temptation may have been in the particular case, how hard for the man to see his duty, or seeing, to practise it. We all know this, I suppose, very thoroughly in our own case. We all know, how little others understand us, how impossible it would be for even our best friend, to state all our reasons and feelings for doing as we did in any particular matter. Sometimes they would judge of us better, sometimes worse, than we have deserved ; but never, never would they judge exactly right.

Which of us does not know this quite for certain, in his own case ? Which of us considers it enough in the case of others ?

And when we *must* find fault and condemn (as in sundry ways it may be the duty, of many of us), still let us remember these precious, these loving words, “moderation,” “equity,” “gentleness,” “forbearance,” so much recommended by the great and holy Apostle. And he did not only recommend, but practised them. Who ever was worse treated than he

was by the Jewish people, generally in every city? Yet hear how gently he spoke of them, how kindly he gave them credit for not meaning the very worst. "I bear them record," he says, "that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." So also, when he had to do with the Athenians, how lovingly did he put himself into their place, saying, "I see that ye yourselves acknowledge that ye worship an unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." Do you not see, how gently he dealt with them, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, how he spoke to them as he would be spoken to, mindful of his and our Lord's golden rule? O that we were more like him! We talk indeed much of charity, kind judgement and moderation. It seems to be that of all virtues, which in these times is most praised, most in fashion as far as words go. But we must not too hastily give ourselves credit for it. It is an easy matter, in comparison, for a man to be moderate, candid, charitable, when his own interests and fancies, or those of any party or sect he belongs to, are not interfered with. But the trial of moderation is, when people go against what we reverence and hold dear, and hinder our favourite plans and pursuits, and very likely speak ill of us, and yet we not only speak, but in our hearts think, gently of them: when we go out of our way rather to imagine good motives for their doings, than bad ones: when, as S. Paul says in that famous description of true charity, we rejoice not in their iniquity, but rejoice in their truth and honesty; being better pleased that our enemy should mean to serve God, however mistakenly, than that he should

sin by ill-meaning, however that might seem to strengthen our cause.

I say the more on this subject just now, because our country and our Church too, unhappily, is at this moment so very much broken up into sects and parties, some political, others religious; and people, who take part in either, (as many can hardly help doing,) are so very sadly tempted to speak and think hastily of one another. We shall do well, perhaps, in the special self-examination, which this solemn time of preparation for Christmas Communion ought to bring along with it, we shall do well to notice particularly, how far we may have been wanting in Christian moderation and gentleness, when we have been speaking and thinking of others: whether we have kept ourselves from putting the worst interpretation upon their doings, and from rejoicing when they did wrong (alas! that ever Christians should feel tempted to have such a feeling as that, a feeling fit only for the evil and lost spirit), whether we have truly rejoiced in their goodness, and have been pleased to have things turn out to their credit, when they deserved it.

And yet we are not to be too sure, that all is right, if we have not been severe in our judgements. Perhaps we may not have cared so much as we ought to do for the holy truths of the Bible and the Prayer Book, and so it has been easy for us to judge gently, so far as we did judge, of persons who may have been on different sides in such matters. But how has it been with us in points wherein we were much interested? where our own earthly gain or credit, or the gain or credit of our family, has been concerned?

or in any matter in which we have taken a strong fancy one way or another? Have we been in such cases always so moderate, so gentle, so considerate towards the other side, as that people, seeing us, should say, What a good thing the faith of the Church is, which can make men so charitable?

In questions such as these, my brethren, I would wish that we might exercise ourselves, very many of us, before we draw near to that Holy Thing, for which we ought now to be preparing ourselves. I could wish that, while we spare others, we should take care to be sharp enough with ourselves. Many, we know, in that Day will find themselves on the wrong side, who little expect such a thing now. God grant for Christ's sake, that it be not your case and mine!

SERMON XL.

THE SYMPATHY OF CHRIST OUR COMFORT IN DISAPPOINTMENT.

ISA. xlix. 4.

“Then I said, I have laboured in vain ; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain ; yet surely my judgement is with the Lord, and my work with my God.”

THE joyful and happy time of the year is come. Wherever we go, some token or other of joy and gladness is to be seen : gatherings of friends, children coming home, gifts and tokens of neighbourly and Christian love, congratulations and welcomes, preparations for mirth and feasting. This is the first, the childish feeling, with which we have all of us been taught to think on Christmas. The very name sounds to us of “joy and gladness, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.” And it is very well and very natural for the young and cheerful, for those who are comparatively innocent, fresh as it were from the bright waters of their Baptism ; it is very well for such to feel nothing but joy when that happy day is coming, the Birthday of our Saviour, the heavenly Sun rising on the world. Christmas Eve to them may be all hope and delight ; like the

feeling that affectionate children have, when about to return home after some long absence. But all we the rest, older persons, persons of experience, used to watch their own and other's ways, more especially penitent persons, cannot well feel unmixed joy. When we sit down now on Christmas Eve, and begin, as we ought, to think over things and prepare for the great Feast of to-morrow; an awful trembling, often a deep sorrow, may and ought to keep company with our joy.

We naturally look back, at such a time, to the Christmas Eve of last year, and the feelings and purposes we had then. Surely there is hardly one of us that does so, but must own himself more or less disappointed. Things have not turned out altogether as we could have wished. Our circumstances are not such as we looked forward to. We ourselves are not the men we hoped to have been by this time. As to our circumstances the matter is plain: no man "knows what a day may bring forth;" and therefore it is out of the question, our being at this Christmas as favoured in all respects, as, last Christmas, we hoped to be. God Almighty may have been very gracious to us, in regard of the chief earthly blessings. Yet there is sure to be something or other to keep us in mind, how frail and how vain we are. And many, in this as in other years, have sadly to remember some great change, some loss, failure or disappointment, clouding over their Christmas thoughts. Friends have left us, hopes have faded away; plans and purposes, that seemed most promising, have come to nothing, or have turned to mischief.

And what is worse, and more to the purpose of this very solemn time; who among us has not reason to own himself spiritually disappointed? Whatever holy thoughts and purposes we had at this season last year, which of us can say they have borne such fruit as he hoped? I speak now to those among you more particularly, who *do* look seriously, more or less, into the state of their own souls. I speak to the communicants of this congregation. They are commonly in larger numbers at Christmas and Easter than at any other time, and last Christmas Day in particular, there were as many as ninety who partook of the sacred Feast here. To them, in particular, I wish to speak: and I say to them, I will not believe that you came, any of you, quite profanely and at random. I will not believe but that you had serious wishes, purposes of heart, last Christmas Eve, as to the kind of way you would go on in, the kind of persons you would become, against another Birthday of your Lord. That other Birthday is at hand. In a few hours the Feast will be again; and many, I trust, very many of you, are now more or less in deep thought how to come worthily to it. Of course one very serious part of your thoughts is; "Have I done the good, which I intended to do, when I communicated last Christmas? Is my conduct now as much better than it was then, as I promised myself it would be by God's help, long before this time?"

These you may perceive are two separate questions. First, What good have I done? Secondly, Am I a better Christian? And each of them, if you answer it fairly and do not shut your eyes to the truth, had need make you very serious.

Which of us must not own himself disappointed, when he looks out upon those around him, those whom God has put in any way under his care, and sees so little difference in them for the better, nay, often, as far as he can judge, that they rather seem to be worse than better? We especially, who are labourers, however unworthy, in Christ's vineyard, do you think we have no melancholy misgivings, no sinkings and searchings of heart, when year after year goes away, and so many remain indifferent, so many unruly, so very few seem really going on to perfection?

What father has not some cause to fear and regret for his children, what master for his servants, what teacher for those under his charge, what rich man for his dependants and poorer neighbours, that they have not profited more by him, since last year's Christmas? that his doings in their behalf have not seemed to be so blest, as he then hoped and prayed?

And, what is sadder still, when we come to look into the cause of this, we shall most of us find too much ground to fear, that it lies more or less in ourselves.

Our labours to do good are not fully blest, because we take no pains to become good. That is the great disappointment of all. You would, many of you, I daresay, if now asked, be ready to confess, that you do not seem to have got on as you intended in the way of inward holiness.

Your sins are not so entirely forsaken, your prayers not so well said, your thoughts not so carefully kept in order, your time not so diligently improved,

as you resolved they should be, in last year's self-examination.

You are not where you hoped to be: evil thoughts perhaps still torment you, and you are not sure that you hate them as entirely as you ought. You have still great difficulty in minding your prayers; heavenly thoughts and heavenly things seem to you as much as ever to fade from your sight, when you try to look at them, and to leave you to be haunted by the unsatisfying fancies of the world. Your temper perhaps feels unsubdued; things seem, as before, to provoke and unsettle you; you are continually overtaken by trifling faults and omissions of duty; and when you think it all over, and bring it, as it were, to a point, as in this solemn Eve, it may be your heart sinks within you, and you are almost tempted to give up all steady endeavours to be holy. Christmas Eve, or the eve of any other Communion day, would be miserable indeed, if it brought such thoughts, and did not at the same time furnish the remedy for them.

And what is the remedy? what the comfort? Why, we see by the Scriptures, that Christ Himself has a fellow-feeling with us. As He was in all points tempted like as we are, sin only excepted; so among other things He vouchsafed to be in a manner disappointed and to labour in vain. Here we find Him, in words spoken by His Prophet, complaining of the failure of His merciful plans. "I have laboured," He says, "in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." Who would think that such words were the words of the high Almighty One? Yet surely they are His words. He Who can do all

things, speaks accents of bewailing; He mourns over His wasted power. He feels, after a sort, as if His labours bore no fruit. Christ speaks in particular of His will to have the Jews for His own people. “^a The Lord said unto Me, Thou art My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” It was His will to save the tents of Judah first. It was His way and that of His Apostles, to look first after the Jews in every city; and, when they would not receive them, to turn to the Gentiles. But the Jews everywhere spake against Him, contradicting and blaspheming. They followed too exactly the pattern set them by their priests and elders in condemning Him. Thus even our Lord Himself condescended to be disappointed in that which was, speaking after the manner of men, the great object of His life. “^b He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”

And it was no new thing to hear our Lord speak thus mournfully of the effect of His labours. Listen to Him in the Book of Psalms; “^c My people would not hear My voice, and Israel would not obey Me.” “O that My people would have hearkened unto Me, for if Israel had walked in My ways, I should soon have put down their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries.” And in Isaiah, “^d What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” He speaks in like manner of the heathen cities also; “^e we would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed.” And indeed the very title of long-

^a Is. xlix. 3.

^b S. John i. 11.

^c Ps. lxxxix. 12, 14, 15.

^d Isa. v. 4.

^e Jer. li. 9.

suffering by which He so delights to call Himself, is but the same thing in another way.

Such as well considered these places in God's dealings of old, would not be astonished at the Prophet representing our Lord as one greatly disappointed, "stretching out His hands all day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people." It would not greatly startle them, when the time came, to hear Him likening Himself to a hen which would gather her chickens under her wings, while they, His people, would not. They would be prepared for His weeping over Jerusalem, for His wishing, as it were, in vain; "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace."

In all these, and many other places, did our Lord and Saviour fulfil the prophecy which represents Him complaining; "I have laboured in vain; I have spent My strength for nought and in vain." So that none of His people henceforth should have a right to complain of the sense of disappointment and failure, as though it were a grief which He had not borne before them.

See now, how the Saviour of the world comforts and stays Himself under this burden of disappointment. "Yet surely My judgement is with the Lord," such are His words, "and My work with My God." His consolation is appealing to His Father: "His judgement is with the Lord." Whereas He was reproached and blasphemed on earth, He commits His cause to His Father in heaven, to Him that judgeth righteously.

"His work is with His God:" whereas His labours

^f Rom. x. 20. Isa. lxxv. 2.

^g S. Luke xix. 34.

seemed to fail; He leaves them also to His Father. He knows that they do not really fail. They are like the rain that cometh down, and the snow from heaven, which seem to be poured away and come to an end, but, after awhile, it is seen that they have been doing their task, by the earth which brings forth and buds, where they had fallen. This comfort Christ applies to Himself, in that great trouble which the Prophet in the text mentions: "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength." Though I stretched forth My hands upon the Cross to a disobedient and gainsaying people, yet they are not stretched out in vain: for "^hI was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me." This was our Lord's comfort, and it was the comfort of S. Paul in the same trouble, as may be seen at large in the Epistle to the Romans. Israel, as a nation, is cast away; but the faithful remnant and the believing Gentiles are the true Israel, taken in its stead. Like to this has been the Church's comfort from the beginning: when those to whom she spake seemed to reject her, others who were within hearing have listened and believed.

The young man, to whom our Lord spake of making himself poor for Christ's sake, went away sorrowful, and Christ's words seemed to be lost for the time. But the Scripture nowhere says of that same young person, that he did not afterwards think better of it: and we know that our Lord's saying did afterwards cause thousands, both at the day of Pentecost and in all after-ages of the Church, to sell all that they had

^h Rom. x. 20. Isa. lxxv. 1.

and give to the poor, and take up their Cross to follow Him in a life of holy severity. This should be the consolation of those who have sincerely tried to serve Christ, if they seem to see no fruit of their labours, no good done to those about them. They are not at once to conclude that they have spent their strength for nought and in vain: good advice may have been scorned by those to whom it was offered, but others, within hearing, may have marked it and profited by it. Good books may be put by for the present; but a time may come when some one shall read them, and be helped by them in the way of repentance. Good example may be overlooked by those next to it; but others further off may be won by it. Be not therefore cast down, nor think it altogether your own fault, if, for the present, little or no good seem to have come of your well-meant labours. “ⁱ Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” The draught of cold water given to a disciple for Christ’s sake, though it chance to be spilt before it reach his lips, “shall in no wise lose its reward.”

But how is it with that other and sadder disappointment, which, as I said, too many of us, if we deal conscientiously with ourselves, have to endure at such times as these? What are we to do, when our hearts sorrowfully tell us, how much we have fallen short of the goodness and holiness which we intended this time last year? Why, if you have been really trying, if you have watched and denied yourself steadily and on principle, however imperfectly, you must not “sorrow as others that have no

ⁱ Ps. xxxvii. 5.

hope." There is great comfort for you; indeed, there is. Whatever you have done in this way in the secret of your own heart, or in those seemingly lesser things which men cannot take notice of, depend upon it, is not lost, it cannot have fallen to the ground without any fruit at all.

Do mothers watch their little children, when first they begin to distinguish one person from another; so that hardly a breath or look escapes them, so earnestly do they welcome the first token of their babe's knowing and loving them? And can it be possible that any faint breathing, any silent effort, of penitent love should be unmarked by Him Who laid down His life for us, Who teaches our mothers how to love us, Who, in His own Person and that of His blessed Virgin Mother, set forth as at this time the perfect pattern of Infancy and mother's love? He has told you, not a hair of your head shall perish, how much less any of the "holy desires, good counsels or just works," which His own good Spirit has put into your hearts in your endeavours to amend your ways!

Depend upon it, if you have been sincerely trying to be better Christians, since this holy season last year, you *are* better, whether you feel it so or not. Your feeling desolate cold and dull at this or that particular time, your heart not warming as you could wish, is no proof of your having "spent your strength in vain." Your work, your sincere and honest work, in trying to get the better of your sins, is with your God. It is not, cannot be lost. It is sealed up among His treasures, as surely as the unrepented sins of those who go on in their wickedness are there. It

is written in His book; nothing can blot it out, but future unfaithfulness on your part. Imperfect, nay unclean, as it was in itself, yet if it were done in God's faith and fear, it is a good work in His eyes, pleasing and acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ. For, indeed, this is the very case of which the beloved disciple says, "^k If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The Blood of Christ avails by His grace to wash away the stains and defects, which cleave even to the best of man's works, seen as they are by the most pure and Holy One. Be sure then, that if on the whole you have been walking in the light, if you have not wilfully continued in known sin, nor fallen again into the sins which you had repented of, the Blood of Christ will be graciously applied to wash away the frailties and infirmities, which have mingled with your later good works, and which you still feel hanging about you, as well as the greater and more serious sins which have now no more dominion over you.

And if you are permitted to have good hope of this, be not too much troubled, though you still feel those weaknesses and infirmities hanging about you in a distressing way. If you do not give way to them, they may even do you good instead of harm; for they will be part of your penance, not of your sin. If they keep you humble and afraid, when otherwise you would be gay and confident, they will indeed be a great blessing to you. But then you

^k 1 S. John i. 7.

must always struggle against them ; you must get up every morning with the prayer and vow, not to allow yourself that day in any kind of sin little or great ; and if you try in earnest, you will every day do something (though generally without knowing it yourself) towards the better accomplishment of that vow.

One word more, if people are to be patient and hopeful, if they are to work on without desponding, even when they seem to themselves to have made little progress in Christian goodness, much less should they leave off any good and well-meant work, for want of the sort of encouragement, which they may have looked for, but failed to receive from their brethren. For instance, it is no uncommon thing to be disheartened in shewing kindness to a neighbour and in labouring for his good, because you find he is not thankful. Well : but were his thanks all that you looked for, when you began to shew kindness ? Did not you look at all to something higher ? to the praise of God ? to a heavenly recompense, to hearing the blessed words “ Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these, ye did it unto Me ? ” If you had no eye to this, it was not Christian goodness ; if you did look that way, you know that being thanked by your fellow-creatures makes no difference to that ; your judgement is still with the Lord, your work and its reward with your God, whether men are duly grateful to you or no. And the case is much the same with such of you as are labourers, servants, persons whose calling places them in obedience to others ; if you take pains to do well, and it is not regarded ; if you are not thanked and praised for

your work, it is a great temptation to you to be careless ; yet surely not such a temptation, but that true faith will enable you to get over it. If you have true faith, you will say to yourselves, "Our Master in heaven, at any rate, will never forget, never fail to reward what we do sincerely, however imperfectly, in the way of duty."

With such thoughts may you and all of us prepare to keep the Birthday of Christ : resolutely turning from all sin, and humbly committing our weak endeavours, as we must our souls when we die, into His hands, as into the hands of a faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour. Frail and unsatisfactory as we are and all that is ours, He will not reject us so coming to Him ; we and our doings shall be precious in His sight.

SERMON XLI.

HOW WE HAVE HINDERED OURSELVES.

ISA. xlviii. 18.

“O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.”

WHEN people have gone wrong in any respect, and come at last to be aware of it, we know how natural it is for them to begin considering and calculating, how it would be with them at this moment, had they not made such and such a mistake. As, e. g., suppose a person on a journey to take a wrong turn and lose his way: by and by he finds out his mistake: then he is almost sure to say to himself, “Had it not been for that foolish turn, I should now have been at my journey’s end, or so much farther advanced towards it.” And of course, the more he had been warned of the right way, the more chance he had of knowing it in the first instance, so much the more is he now grieved and angry with himself.

Or suppose any one is ill—yourself or some person belonging to you, according to the wayward and perverse humours, which are but too natural to us, or it may be from mere infirmity and ignorance, without any fault at all, you are very likely to make some

capital mistake, imagining the disease to be other than it is, or using a wrong medicine, or improper diet: and then when the sickness increases, and we come to discover our mistake, how natural and how painful is the thought, "Had it not been for such and such a neglect, such and such an unseasonable medicine, such and such an instance of bad nursing, the complaint might by this time have been almost or altogether removed." And of course such thoughts are very humbling and mortifying. They make us feel bitterly, not only how frail we are, but also how rash and unwise we are, how vain it is for us to depend for a moment on our own sense, steadiness, and knowledge.

Now the Bible teaches us in many ways to apply the same way of thinking to our spiritual and religious condition; we may well do so, every time we examine ourselves in good earnest. When we have looked fairly back on our own hearts and lives, for any length of the time past, which of us all will not find too much reason to say in his heart, "O that I had had, all this time, the same thoughts of my God, my duty and my danger, as I seem to have now! O that I had drawn back from such and such evil ways, which I now see could only issue in the broad road that leads to destruction; would to God I had shunned them in times past, as I hope to shun them hereafter, if He gives me time. Alas! how much nearer should I then have been to my God and Saviour, than I now am! how much better and how much happier! How plainly now may I discern the very great danger and wickedness of such and such an action, committed so long ago, in spite (perhaps)

of very distinct warnings. I thought little of it then; I thought, though it was a false step, that it would not be hard for me to recover it, and that speedily. And now I see it has caused me to go on from one sinful liberty to another, until I am so far down the hill, that I almost fear I shall never be able to climb up it again. I am sure it must be a special mercy of God, and a special repentance on my part, if such an one, as I have made myself, is ever to come right at last."

I am afraid there are too many of us, my brethren, who have great occasion, great need, to exercise ourselves in thoughts like this. And this season of preparation for Christmas, is surely one of the most suitable in all the year for such painful yet wholesome accusing of ourselves. What can we do better in the way of preparing ourselves for judgement, than to judge and punish ourselves in time (if, please God, it may be in time), for not being where we might have been, in respect of Christian goodness, had we but made good use of the opportunities we have had since last Advent. The Church invites us to such meditations in her collect for the present week: wherein we confess, that it is nothing wanting on God's part, but it is only our own sins and wickedness by which we are so sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us. "a The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but our iniquities have separated between us and our God, and our sins have hid His Face from us, that He will not hear." The weight which we are to lay aside, in order to run our ap-

^a Isa. lix. 1, 2.

pointed course, is nothing of God's laying upon us, but rather it is the burthen of our own sins and wickedness. And it is well, that when God is calling upon us to lay aside that burden once and for all, we should look back and take sorrowful notice, how far it has thrown us behind ; how very much nearer we might now be to Jesus, Whom we look unto, if we had long ago girded up our loins and ridden ourselves of our clinging, entangling sins.

In thus looking back on our past condition, so long ago (let us say,) as last Christmas, the first thing will be to consider in what kind of a way we were then. Too many alas ! have been so very little used to attend to their own inward and spiritual state, that they could give no particular account whatever, how it was with them last Christmas. But what then ? This does but shew, how needful it is for them to wake up, and look in earnest over their own spiritual accounts. If they cannot exactly remember last Christmas, they know very well, in a general way, what their past goings on have been : how deep has been their forgetfulness of God, how manifold their sins and carelessness towards their brethren, how foul, how corrupting to their own hearts the thoughts and ways in which they have habitually indulged. O, if such be the witness of our conscience, let us greatly fear to put it aside ; for it is the token of God's good Spirit striving with sin in our hearts. Let us in all ways force ourselves to attend to it : we shall find many a help which we little dream of. Look, e. g. towards yonder Font, thou who art beginning to feel how far thou art from God : look at any little child, whom thou seest there baptized and signed with

Christ's Cross, and say to thyself, "I too was once a little child, newly baptized, as pure and as holy as yonder innocent is now, and as certain of heavenly joy, had I died in mine infancy: such I was then: alas! what am I now?" Or look at any of the best and holiest whom you see, especially if he be one of your own sort, your own rank and age, born and bred in the like temptations with yourself: and say in your heart, "such as he is, such might I have been at this moment, had I but used, as he did, the means of grace, which were vouchsafed alike to us both." In this way even they, who are but now beginning to feel at all, may obtain help to understand their own miserable condition, by comparison with what it might have been.

But now I will suppose that I am speaking to one who is not only just beginning—to one who, as long ago as this time last year, was employed, more or less earnestly, in examining himself. I would say to such an one, "You cannot but remember in some degree, what your condition was last Christmas: what your conscience then told you of your own prevailing sins, your abuse or neglect of God's mercies. Well then, you can judge, at least in a general way, whether there is now any great difference in you. You are a year older. Is there a year's improvement in you? You are so much nearer death, judgement, eternity. Are you so much better prepared to meet them? If you recollect that, at this time last year, you had to blame yourself for any one sin in particular, do you humbly hope, that now that sin is conquered within you, or in a fair way to be so? If your eyes were unchastened, have you learned to restrain them, and

draw them back from improper objects ? If your appetites were greedy, how far have you mortified them ? If you had proud thoughts and looks, have you really and regularly tried to become lowly ? If you were engaged in any quarrel, or indulging any feeling of unchristian dislike of any one whatever, what is become of it now ? Are you or are you not sincerely reconciled, at least in heart and wish ? If you were idle and dishonest then, are you diligent and trustworthy now ? If you were then irregular or inattentive, *wilfully* inattentive, to your prayers in Church or at home, are you keeping a better rule now ?" Questions like these, every one who is minded will easily know how to answer : and surely in most cases the answer, if truly and discreetly given, will be a very sorrowful one. Too much reason surely shall we all find, to mourn over our own strange and inexcusable slowness in amending the faults which we were then really ashamed of, and practising the graces which we then really did desire. None of us, not one will be able to say truly, that he had not means, had not help, to grow better. God forbid that we should charge Him, our loving Father, so foolishly. For (not to speak now of other helps and warnings) surely, from God came the fears and misgiving of our own hearts, which we have had from time to time : at least we had, when we last examined ourselves. Where is the fruit of those warnings ? Any one of them, properly taken and really followed up, as far as it might have been, would have proved the means of our entire conversion, the full salvation of our souls. What have we done with them ? What is become of them all ? Perhaps they led to distinct

resolutions of amendment, which for the time at least seemed serious. Those vows and resolutions, each one of them, were as the Finger of God to our wandering spirits, pointing out the way, and setting us forward in it. What shame, what pity, if we are now no further advanced in it than we were then—if we have rather gone backward! Perhaps for some little space of time, you kept your vows and resolutions of last Christmas; enough it may be, to prove to you, how very precious and blessed they would have been, had you thoroughly persevered in them. But you were unstable, you were like the stony ground, in which the seed sprang up quickly, but withered away because it lacked moisture: and so the memory of those brief endeavours seems to remain, only to condemn you. I say, it *seems* so to remain. For it need not be so finally. By God's abundant grace the remembrance of that good beginning may and will encourage you to better things by and by, if you will set yourself in earnest to God's work. And to this end you will do well to recollect also, what were the special snares and hindrances which so soon and so grievously blemished your efforts to improve. You cannot but remember the kind of temptations, which proved too strong for your feeble repentance; and how, and with what self-deceiving thoughts, you gave way to them. And at times the reflection may well come bitterly over you, "Had I resisted that one temptation, had I put down at once that one subtle excuse, all might now have been right with me. I might have had peace of mind and a conscience purified by sincere repentance. Now, I scarcely know how it is with me." Then it will be a wonder if, in the course of

the twelve months, you have not experienced many merciful turns of the good providence of Almighty God, interfering just when you needed, with warning, with chastening or with help; how many of these have you thrown away, knowingly and wilfully? He has spoken to you and dealt with you over and over, in mercy and in threatening: you could not help feeling that it was something very serious, that really it was the great God speaking to you: but you turned away and would not hear what He said.

Oh, it is a sad history indeed, which the best of us would have to read concerning himself out of God's book, could he once have it open before him, but for this one year past. Well may it bow us down to the earth, when we feel what we are, and consider what we might have been. It is God's own reproof to His own people continually, "^bO that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight!" Or as Samuel said, making Saul understand that by his undutifulness he had missed an opportunity which God had graciously provided for him; which, if he had taken, he would not have forfeited the blessing. The word to Saul was; "^cThou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue." And to mention one instance more, and that the most remarkable of all, the whole nearly of God's ancient people are told, first by David and then by Isaiah, to

^b Deut. xxxii. 29, 30.

^c 1 Sam. xiii. 13.

think much of the great loss which they had brought upon themselves by their backslidings. David in the eighty-first Psalm has these sorrowful words; “^d O that My people would have hearkened unto Me: for if Israel had walked in My way, I should soon have put down their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries.” The devil and his angels should have no power to hurt them. “^e The haters of the Lord should have been found liars: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest wheat flour: and with honey out of the stony rock should I have satisfied thee.” And Isaiah, years afterwards, makes his lament, in the name of God, almost in the same words. “^f O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments; then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea”—blessings never ending, ever freshly beginning—“thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before Me.”

We see by these Scriptures, that it is well for us, when we would be penitent, to mortify and humble our proud hearts with the true consideration, in how much better place we should be now, had we made the right use of our opportunities. But let it not be done in a desponding way. God forbid! He calls us to consider our ways, not simply to break our hearts, but to make them so broken and contrite, as that we may bring them to Him to be cured. He would have a sorrow, which would not make us less active

^d Ps. lxxxi. 14, 15.

^e Ib. 16, 17.

^f Isa. xlviii. 18, 19.

in pleasing Him, but more so. He says, "Look back and see how far you have wandered, and when and how you began to wander, that you may lose no time in returning to the right path, and may know how to keep yourself from erring again : whereabouts and on which side, you have most need to be on your guard. Look back upon your sad abuse of time past, that you may be humble for all the time to come. Look back, that, seeing how it was with you, when you thought to do without God, you may, for the time to come, keep fast hold of His loving Hand, still in exceeding graciousness held out to you. Look back on your own sad failures, that you may be the more charitable in judging others, and more patient, less bitterly vexed, when, in the world and even in the Church around you, you seem to behold so many things going very wrong." Scripture, as we have seen, would lead us to expect a great deal of decay and failure, in the visible working of the Church and of the several portions of it. Our Lord Himself more especially utters such warnings. Wherefore, if we see iniquity abound, and the love of ever so many waxing cold, it ought not to make us fretful and unbelieving, any more than our sad sense of our own sins should make us doubt or deny our Saviour. Two things He requires of you ; to resign yourselves to Him in what you cannot help, and, when you have a choice, earnestly to obey Him : and two things He offers you in return, to receive Him even now in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and to be received by Him in His good time, in the heaven which He hath purchased, and is preparing, for you.

SERMON XLII.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM I. DEEP AND TRUE REPENTANCE.

ISA. i. 16, 17.

“Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well.”

FROM very early times, the Church of Christ has read the prophecies of Isaiah in the time of Advent; God having so ordered it, that, in the words of this Prophet, more plainly and continually than in most other parts of the Old Testament, Christ's Advent, i. e. His coming, should be set forth. Isaiah was raised up, when the wickedness of the Jewish people was coming to the full and God was about to visit them by the destruction of their city, and the fearful captivity under the Babylonians. And it pleased Him so to guide the tongue of that holy Prophet, that the words, which he spake about Babylon and the Jews, might give warning for ever to Christian people of the danger they were in, should they be found breaking God's covenant: and, on the other hand his comfortable words of God's mercy in bringing back His people, were to be an encouragement for ever, to such as try in earnest to keep their baptismal vows.

When therefore the Prophet says, “Wash you, make

you clean, put away the evil of your doings," we, of course, must understand him in the first place to mean, what those Jews should do, to whom he had been speaking so earnestly of their sins. Their case was very bad and dangerous. They were a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that were corrupters." They had broken the covenant in the most direct and deadly manner: forsaking the Lord, and provoking the Holy One to jealousy. Their condition was like that of persons in a most desperate and deadly sickness: like Job, when Satan had found leave to smite him. "From the sole of the foot unto the crown of the head there was no soundness in them, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." Had it not been for a very small remnant, which God had left among them, their sin and their punishment too would have been equal to that of Sodom and Gomorrha. It was in vain that some of them thought to make God their friend by being regular in their prayers and sacrifices, in keeping the appointed times and feasts, while their "hands were full of blood" and other iniquity, and while they still continued in their evil ways. On the contrary He tells them plainly; "Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto Me: your new moons and sabbaths, your appointed feasts, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth: they are a trouble unto Me: I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread out your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear." As long as they were in wilful sin, their very prayers and offerings

were sin also in God's sight. What then were they to do? Was their case hopeless? Had they no chance of mercy? Nay, so infinite is His goodness, that He still gives them an opportunity of recovery, and tells them how they may avail themselves of it. "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." That is the true remedy for their lost condition, even real repentance and amendment, here set in opposition to the false remedies which they had devised for themselves, imagining, that by exactness in some one part of God's service, such as sacrifice and keeping of sabbaths and holy days, they might make up for wilful sin and transgression in some other part. Whereas the only cure, as far as they were concerned, lay in real deep universal repentance and amendment; and if that were truly and thoroughly applied, God in His compassion would do all the rest. "Though their sins were scarlet, they should be white as snow: and though they were red like crimson, they should be as wool." And no doubt, if the generation of the Jews in Isaiah's time, as a nation, had taken this warning, they would have been delivered from the fearful captivity; Jerusalem would not then have been burned with fire, but they, "being willing and obedient, would have eaten the good of the land."

Further, we know from the New Testament and from the early writers of the Church, that this part of the Prophet Isaiah has a special application also to the times of our Lord Himself. S. Paul tells us that the verse, "^a Except the Lord of Sabaoth had

^a Rom. ix. 29.

left unto us a very small remnant, we had been as Sodom," was intended to signify how very few of the Jews, when our Lord appeared upon earth, would be moved either by His preaching or by that of His Apostles. Also his manner of speaking of their sacrifices and feasts was indeed a prophetic warning of what should happen when our Lord came, how the solemn services of the Temple would cease, and God would be no more served as He had been under the law of Moses. By the same rule the washing spoken of in the text must be Baptism, and the change described in it, that entire repentance and amendment which is required in persons to be baptized. Indeed, wherever washing or cleansing is spoken of typically in the Scriptures, there seems no doubt that Baptism is the chief thing intended; Baptism duly received, that is, in true faith and repentance. "Repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," is the one thing needful for the delivery and healing of persons not yet in God's Kingdom: so that, in reference to its blessings, the Holy Ghost says unto them, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool:" which verse indeed by many in the ancient Church was thought to be spoken particularly to the slayers of our Lord and then of His Apostles. Even to them, stained with that holy Blood, the benefit of the sacrifice was offered, were they but willing to receive it, and live accordingly, as S. Peter said to them on the Day of Pentecost; "^bI wot that through ignorance ye did it. . . . Repent therefore

^b Acts iii. 17, 19.

and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”
 “^cRepent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

These then are the two treasures of mercy, offered in the prophetic words to grievous sinners, on their truly laying hold of God’s covenant. First, to the fallen Jewish people before the captivity, stained as they were with idolatry and innumerable sins, He says, “Wash you, make you clean,” so shall your sins, though scarlet, be white as snow. And next and chiefly to their descendants, both in our Lord’s time and ever since, is the same word spoken: “Wash you,” in the laver of regeneration, “make you clean,” by Christian repentance and holiness, and there will be an end of your old sins; they shall be, as though they had never been. For Baptism is especially that, by which we have remission of sins; as S. Peter teaches, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,” and after Him the whole Church in one of her Creeds, “I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.”

But here it may well come into a person’s mind, “all this is most plainly in the Bible, and most merciful on God’s part; but what am I, alas! to do? I, who never, since I knew anything, was in the condition of a heathen, to be called either to mere repentance, or to repentance with Baptism? I, who was baptized by God’s distinguishing unspeakable mercy, before I could be aware of such a thing, and have since unhappily, too often broken my vow, then

^c Acts ii. 38.

made, and fallen into wilful, deadly, perhaps habitual sin; how can such an one as I am make out anything for my comfort in the saying 'Wash you, make you clean,' since I never can be baptized again?" It is most true, you never can be again baptized: perhaps therefore you never can have the full fruit of the whole promise. It may be, their condition, who have sinned grievously after Baptism, may never come to be as if they had not so sinned, even upon the truest repentance; and yet true repentance may make a very very great difference in it. The saying "Wash you, make you clean," may relate properly and chiefly to holy Baptism; and yet, if God has appointed any way to heal the wounds occasioned by men's breaking their baptismal vow, the same precious words may belong to their case too, though in a lower and less perfect sense. So we humbly hope and trust that it is. We humbly trust, that deep and true repentance, never to be repented of, may so far be truly called a washing and cleansing, in that it may hinder us from quite losing God's blessing of inward and heavenly purity given us in Baptism, so that we may still be counted in some one of the lowest places in the Kingdom of Heaven. And one reason, why we may hope it may be so, is the manner in which the Old Testament speaks to the Jews of deliverance from their sin. They, as God's chosen people, taken into immediate covenant with Him, were the special type and figure of us Christians, each one of us: they could not be as the heathen, though they wished it; their sins were far worse than the very same sins would have been in persons further from God. Yet we see they might

be forgiven; they are most earnestly exhorted to repentance; and since the sayings generally of the Old Testament to them are to be understood as addressed to each separate Christian, we may hope and pray not to be wrong in so understanding these most comfortable words. Severely as the New Testament speaks of those who fall away after receiving the grace of God, the prophetic words of the Old yet encourage us to hope that there may be repentance and salvation even for the worst of them, if he will but take the right way. There is, so to speak, a kind of second Baptism; a penitential Baptism, a Baptism of tears, not, like the first and proper Baptism, to be accomplished once for all, but to be continued all our life long. And this will hinder us, by His great mercy, from forfeiting our portion in Jesus Christ: this is His way of restoring us by degrees to the bright and heavenly purity we have lost, or to something more or less near it: so that even of such as we are, a time may come (may God grant it) when it shall be said "Thy sins are forgiven:" "Thy faith hath saved thee:" "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Who is there among us, that is in earnest ashamed and sorry for his manifold breaches of his baptismal vow, and amazed, more and more, at the thought of the condition into which he has brought himself, the graces he has forfeited, the holy things he has profaned, the miserable and accursed company he has put himself into, the heavy sentences of our Lord and His Apostles, to which he has made himself subject?

Such sayings as, “^d He that hateth his brother is a murderer, and we know that no murderer hath eternal life in him:” “^e Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement:” “^f Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart:” and, “^g Whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea:” and, “^h It is impossible for them who have been once enlightened . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance:”—If there be any who carries about with him a heart fearful and amazed with such thoughts as these, surely to him most dear and welcome will be the Prophet’s saying in the text, and whatever other instructions God may give him for bringing forth what our Church calls in the Communion service “worthy fruits of penance.” Such an one, looking earnestly to see what God would have him do, would observe particularly that it is said, “Put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes:” not from before your own eyes, or your neighbour’s; not from before the eyes of men, or even of Angels; but “from before Mine eyes.” If we would ever be made clean again, and recover anything like our baptismal innocency, if we would repent and do our first works, the works for which God at first intended us, this, this is what we must first attend to, that “ⁱ the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the

^d 1 S. John iii. 15.^e S. Matt. xii. 36.^f Ib. v. 28.^g Ib. xviii. 6.^h Heb. vi. 4.ⁱ 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." We must take care that the evil of our doings be put away, before His eyes as well as before the eyes of men; that we do not look greedily and wistfully after sins which we are afraid or ashamed, or want opportunity to commit: that we take no liberties in secret, which we should be ashamed to have known openly; that we do not wilfully or craftily pervert His word, or make ourselves deaf or dull or inattentive, when we know in our hearts that His word would condemn us. How is it when we are in the company of any wise and good person, who knows us very well indeed, who, we know, is always watching us, and who has found us out before now, and warned us seriously against some of our favourite secret sins and poor excuses for them? Is not the presence of such an one a check on us? Are we not ashamed to take our usual liberties, and employ our ordinary deceitful arts? Are we not sometimes compelled, almost in spite of ourselves, to speak truth and keep from doing wrong? Now do but consider, that when God is with us, we are in the immediate presence of such a Friend as this, only that He knows both us and our duty in perfection. Why not make up our minds at once to deal frankly with *Him*, Whom we cannot deceive, nor hide from? Why not confess our sins to Him like David, instead of contriving cowardly veils for them, like Balaam, or our first father Adam?

Nothing in the world is so unbecoming a true penitent, as little mean acts men are tempted to, that they may appear to others, and if possible to themselves, a little or perhaps a great deal better Christians

than they are. Such things I mean as pretending to be particularly well employed, or entering on what people suppose to be religious talk, when any one comes near, whom they wish to think well of them. But this is a matter, on which one cannot here be particular. Every man's conscience will tell him fast enough, if he will but attend a little to himself, wherein he is deceitful about such things: "putting away the evil of his doings" before men's eyes only, and not before the eyes of Almighty God.

Another thing to be attended to, if we would seriously obey those words of the Holy Ghost, is the practice of constant confession. We all of us confess ourselves before God miserable sinners; but that alone is not enough, those are words which any child or senseless person might learn to say by rote. God's high and gracious promises to true confession, we may depend on it, are not made to the mere saying those good words, nor to the mere feeling or believing that you are a sinner, and so far miserable, though you do not exactly know why nor how. The confessions which God approves are such as these: first when a sinner "finding his conscience troubled with some weighty matter," comes to God's minister and the steward of His mysteries, as to him who is entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and opens his grief, as a sick man to a physician, not minding the shame and pain of specially confessing what he is greatly ashamed of, when he has good reason to think, that God has put it in his heart to do so for his soul's good. And there is this particular encouragement to such confession, that the priest may, upon it, positively absolve the penitent,

saying, "By Christ's authority to me committed, I absolve thee from all thy sins." That *some* great blessing comes with those words to the sincere humble penitent, who can doubt, without presumptuously doubting either our Lord's word or the Church's interpretation of it? And it seems that, in this way, men do more especially put away the evil of their doings from before God's own eyes: God having declared, that if they first confess their sins, they shall be "justified," as if our taking the full shame on ourselves did somehow, through our Lord's intercession, help to prevail with God to hide His face from them: according to David's reasoning in the fifty first Psalm "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Hide Thy face from my sins and blot out all mine iniquities."

But if any person have no opportunity to use this sort of confession, or believe in his conscience that he had better not, then at least let him be so much the more diligent in confessing his sins to God particularly and by name. Let him remember and name them constantly, when he says his prayers, and seek all opportunities of humbling and punishing himself for them: and this is one blessed use of very frequent Communion, and of daily service in the Church, that they are ways in the hand of God's good Spirit for keeping our old sins before our eyes, that so by continual penitence, the Blood of Christ may be more and more applied to them, and at the last day, by His great mercy, they may be blotted out entirely and for ever.

SERMON XLIII.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM. II.

WATCHFULNESS, PRAYER, SELF-CHASTISEMENT, ALMS.

ISA. i. 16, 17.

“Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes: cease to do evil; learn to do well.”

ALTHOUGH there seems reason to apprehend from Holy Scripture, that, in the regular course of God's dealings with His Church, there is provided no other *such* purification from sin, no other *such* application of the Blood of Christ, as He bestows in Holy Baptism; yet, in His unspeakable mercy, He leaves us not without hope and comfort, unworthy as we are, when we have broken our vows. We indeed are as shipwrecked sailors, but His fatherly compassion gives us a plank to escape upon. Penitence, more or less earnest and bitter according to the degree of our wilful sin, is that one friendly plank, by clinging to which, a person who has departed from his baptismal innocency, may keep his hold on the blessed and saving Cross; may have hope and comfort in this world, and peace and forgiveness in the next.

Now of this penitence, one chief part is, putting

away the evil of our doings before the eyes of God and not before those of man only. Of one way in which this may be done I have before spoken: viz. by humble and earnest confession of our sins, either outwardly to God's priests, or, if that may not be, then, so much the more humbly and earnestly and particularly and frequently, to the Great God and Judge Himself. Another thing, without which it will be impossible for us to put away the evil of our doings from before His eyes, is the strict ordering of our thoughts as well as of our words and actions. Our words and actions, for the most part, are in other men's sight or hearing, either themselves or their consequences; but in our thoughts we are most nearly alone with God, Who only knows our hearts, so that our ordering them well or ill seems to be more especially honouring or affronting Him. And He has distinctly said, "^aThem that honour Me I will honour." Let those then whose hearts are sad and heavy with the consciousness of sins which they have committed, of vows broken, of duties left undone, let them endeavour the more diligently to keep their very thoughts in order. Wherever they go, and whatever they do, let them not permit their fancies to dwell with pleasure upon any sort of abomination; anything which they know God hates. If they have trespassed through evil desire, let them remember and set themselves Job's rule, "^bI made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" Let them remember the Psalmist's prayer: "^cO turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity." On a journey, let them think that God is about their

^a 1 Sam. ii. 30.^b Job xxxi. 1.^c Ps. cxix. 37.

path; and in their chambers, that He is about their bed; and they may have this comfortable hope, that such continual honouring of God, by remembering His Presence, and being careful to harbour no shameful thought before Him, will not only keep them by His grace from adding to their sin, but will also be graciously accepted by Him as a part of true penitence for what is past. It will help, in some way known to God, to apply Christ's atoning Blood to the evil of their former doings, and to put it away from before His eyes: somewhat perhaps in the same way, as a father will the sooner forgive his child who has done wrong, when he sees him very earnest and diligent in watching himself that he may offend no more; and not only so, but in watching his father's countenance, that he may please him in everything, little or great, so far as lies in his power. A father, seeing this, will surely compassionate his child; and the God Who puts it in fathers' hearts to do so, and Who has declared Himself "merciful to them that fear Him, as a father pitieth his own children," He will not suffer any such dutiful endeavour of any poor penitent to fall to the ground quite without a blessing. As the father hastened to meet the prodigal son, yet a great way off, yet uncertain how he should be received, so God Almighty meeteth him that rejoiceth to work righteousness, those that remember Him in His ways. As a father or mother has ways, which no one else knows, of watching and befriending and helping even a very unworthy child, and of encouraging any, even the slightest efforts to amend: so is God, the God of them that return, with every sincere penitent, in

secret and marvellous methods which we dream not of. He makes "^droom enough under them for to go," makes "^eHis way plain before their face," tempers their bitter remorse and self-reproach, gives them by degrees a taste for duties and services which at first might seem cold and dull, helps them to fight against bad habits and by degrees to put good ones in their place, and, however we may grieve, never suffers us to despair. Such consolation the penitents of Christ may hope for, not all at once, but gradually and as it pleases God, if they will set themselves in earnest to put away the evil of their doings from before the eyes of their Maker.

One very excellent help in doing so will be to make all temptation an occasion of prayer. That is, the moment we are conscious to ourselves of any evil passion arising in our hearts, if we breathe silently a prayer to the Almighty for something just contrary to that mischief, and keep on so praying as long as the temptation continues, we are already more than conquerors. This is taking the shield of faith, not only to quench the fiery darts of the Evil one, but even to turn them into means of refreshment and help. E.g. is any one tempted to dislike or envy another, or to desire to have his revenge upon him for any ill treatment? It will be an excellent way, the moment you perceive the feeling springing up in your mind, to turn it into a prayer for that other, that God may bless him in that very respect for which you are inclined to envy him, or forgive him the very wrong which you would fain have revenged upon him. It is likely, that the devil, when he

^d Ps. xviii. 36.^e Ib. v. 8.

finds his worst assaults treated by you as signals for prayer, will leave off tormenting you before long, as he departed from our blessed Saviour, when he had tried all his temptations in vain; and thus you will be left in that blessed tranquillity, which abides in the soul when old temptations are really and in good earnest overcome by faith. Then Angels, heavenly messengers of comfort, will come and minister to you, as they did to your Master.

But, again, it is a good sign of true repentance, when a person is rather jealous even of his own spiritual comfort, like the Psalmist desiring to acknowledge his faults and to have his sins ever before him; praying to God from time to time to make the remembrance of them more grievous than it is, and to give him the like feeling with regard to his other sins, which, as yet, perhaps, escape notice, or, if noticed, are not thought much of. Thus, suppose a person by earnest watching and prayer had got the better of sensual desires, so that, although he must ever feel grief for having offended God in that way, he is delivered from the shame and pain of being conscious that he is still the slave of such sins: while he thinks of this with a trembling kind of thankfulness, let him also fear lest in some other way, in slothfulness, suppose, or pride, or covetousness, he be far gone in mischief, nearly or quite as bad as what he has overcome. Let him beg of God to open his eyes, that he may see, whether there is in God's Book any such charge against him. And if he find that there is, then let him never rest, until his conscience has become as tender about it, as about that other shameful thing: until he shrink from a

proud or covetous thought, as a pure heart shrinks from an unclean one.

Again, we shall do well to be often looking out and contriving ways of penance for ourselves; if it were only to keep us humble, and hinder our coming to think lightly of our old sins. Thus it is said, that the crowing of a cock was to S. Peter, ever after our Lord's Death, as a remembrancer of the sin he had fallen into, in denying Him; and it will be our wisdom in like manner, when anything happens, or is said or done which puts us in mind of past shame or transgression, not to reject that thought, nor escape from it, but to submit to it as a part of our burden; to bear such tokens of our Lord's indignation, because we have sinned against Him.

Also, whatever vexation befalls us, it is good to regard it, as Joseph's brethren did, as coming from the hand of our good and merciful God, to correct us for our sins past; and so, instead of grumbling like unbelievers, to turn it into a blessing and a means of grace, a true help to saving repentance. Joseph's brethren, as the holy Bishop Wilson observes, had gone on quietly and perhaps decently many years, with that grievous sin upon their conscience, that they had envied their brother, plotted to murder him, and at last sold him for a slave. It does not appear that it had much troubled them. They had not sufficiently confessed it and repented of it. But when affliction was coming on them, and they were themselves likely to be made slaves, then their hearts smote them, and "they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother." It was God's

^f Gen. xlii. 21.

way of bringing them to full repentance. And when He sends any affliction upon any of us, who have erred and strayed from His ways, that is His way of bringing us to repentance. When a kind father or mother suddenly strikes a child, or takes away something that it delighted in, is not the child sure, that it has done some wrong thing? So we may be sure, whatever vexes and grieves us, that our heavenly Father, the God of our whole life, is chiding with us for the things we have done amiss. As the widow said to Elijah, when her child died, He is calling our sins to remembrance. Doubtless this will, in one sense, make every affliction bitterer. In such proportion as we have been wilful sinners, we have lost the privilege, we might otherwise have had, of considering what befalls us with the joyful hope, that it is sent principally to increase our glory, and to make our portion a little like that of the Martyrs. But on the other hand there is in it this sweet and heavenly consolation, that it proves God not to have forsaken us. It shews that He has not yet turned from us, with such a saying as that in the earlier part of this first chapter of Isaiah, "Why should ye be smitten any more? ye will revolt more and more?" As often as we, being seriously pained at anything, say to ourselves; "Here is God's hand chastening me for this or that fault," so often we have reason to go on and say again in our hearts, "How can I ever be thankful enough to Him for not having quite cast me off, so grievously as I have provoked Him? How can I ever love and serve Him well enough? What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits that He hath done unto me? At least I will receive the cup of salvation: I will take

thankfully this bitter but wholesome draught of pain, anguish, disappointment, whatever it may be, and will pray that it may not pass from me, until it have done God's will in sending it, by helping me truly and thoroughly to repent of my old and known sins, and to find out and amend whatever else is written against me in God's book."

And if God send no affliction, surely we have the more reason to pray Him to put and keep it in our hearts to follow His saints both of the Old and New Testament by denying ourselves, or, as the Scripture calls, by afflicting our own souls. If we are in good health and have plenty to live upon, surely we are the very persons to think of what the Bible says of penitential fasting, and keeping the body in subjection. Surely one of the reasons, why it is so hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God is this, that, having enough and to spare for the present, if God send no particular calamity, sickness or disappointment upon him, he is in great peril of forgetting his sins. So far, the wilful sins of a rich man are in more danger of remaining unconfessed and unrepented than those of a poor man; and the rich has so much the more need to prevent the judgement of God by chastening and afflicting his own soul. And when I say, a rich man, I mean anyone who has enough to go on comfortably from day to day, without suffering from hunger, thirst, cold or nakedness, and without reasonable fear of such suffering, either in himself or in those who are as parts of himself. All such persons are sorely tempted, for the love of their own ease, to live on in a quiet, careless way, without serious thought of their past transgressions: which trans-

gressions therefore, we must fear, remain, like debts standing against them in God's book. What can such people do better than take the help the Church offers them, in that she appoints certain days of Fasting or Abstinence in which, (with due consideration of their health and other duties) they may resist the calls of appetite, and the several ways of pleasing ourselves in which we all naturally indulge? What can be better for persons in health and leisure, than to have certain days for retirement and examination of the state of their souls, and for humbling themselves for whatever they find amiss? What more wholesome than to interrupt for a while the full tide of worldly business and diversion, that they may think upon their sins, and fast, and punish themselves a little, by way of acknowledgement before God of what they deserve at His hands? Some perhaps will say in their hearts, they have tried fasting before now, and have found it bewilder and weary them so, that they could not think at all steadily of their sins, their duties, or anything else; or it caused a kind of excitement, hurtful both to body and mind: or it was taken notice of and disapproved by friends whom they must attend to. Now such things as these are very good reasons, perhaps, for altering our *manner* of keeping God's fasts. But surely they are no reasons for neglecting altogether what He has so plainly ordained. If our abstinence seem at first (as no doubt it will in many cases) to weaken our hearts for prayer and our hands for charity, let us break our fast a little the sooner: and take care, in our beginnings, not to lay too much upon ourselves. Whenever it is likely to draw hurtful notice, let us hide it as well as we can. If we

really and in our hearts desire to chasten and correct ourselves, we shall find ways of doing so, humbly in the sight of God without people's noticing it at all.

Especially must it be well for those, who, in deep and true penitence for past transgressions, think they can never do too much, never deny themselves too entirely in the way of waiting on their brethren, and doing them real good. Fasting and alms together were regarded in old time as the wings of prayer, and surely they have a virtue in them to waft upwards particularly the prayer of a true penitent. The Ninevites, by fasting and crying mightily to God, prevailed on Him to spare their city, even when sentence had been passed on it; and the Prophet bade Nebuchadnezzar break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor. We cannot suppose that such good deeds have lost anything of the favour with which God views them, now that Christ has come into the world; they are surely more, not less blessed when they are wrought by His grace.

All these good and gracious remedies the heavenly compassion of our God has provided, to help even wilful sinners, if truly believing and penitent, in laying fresh hold on that Cross, from which alone, healing virtue can flow to them, or to any; remedies very bitter at first, but, if humbly and courageously persisted in, sweet and effectual in the end. Let no man's heart therefore so fail him, how deadly soever his sins, as to make him sink idly back in despair of pardon and amendment; but let us from this moment forward put away the evil of our doings (O infinite mercy that we are allowed to do so!) from

before the eyes of Almighty God: by humble confession, by strict watchfulness, by turning temptations into opportunities of prayer, by sorrowful recollection of our sins, and fear for ourselves, by fasting and other ways of self-denial, by alms and other ways of waiting on our brethren. And there are yet other ways and helps to cure a sick soul, which I shall endeavour to set forth another time. So abundant are His remedies, the methods of applying His precious Blood to our sins. May we but have grace to do so, while there is time.

SERMON XLIV.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM. III.

WORKS OF MERCY AND FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

ISA. i. 16, 17.

“Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes: cease to do evil; learn to do well.”

REPENTANCE, that is, change of mind and heart, being the great remedy for our sin, whatever is part of repentance is part of that remedy, and when we are employed about it, we are really doing something (such as creatures and sinners may do) towards our cure. Not only therefore “ceasing to do evil,” of the same kind as one had sinned in before, and guarding against other evils, but “learning” also “to do well,” both in that and in every other kind, is a very necessary part of repentance. God, in His mercy, for the sake of Jesus Christ has given such a blessing to our weak endeavours to do good, that although they never can make satisfaction for any sin (only His Blood and merits can do that,) yet they may really help to sanctify us, and to heal the wounds which sin has made in our souls. They are remedies in the hand of the Holy Spirit, helping to abate and do away the deadly and destroying power of sin, although they may leave, perhaps, its mark and scar.

As, according to the ancient prayer of the Church, the steady and holy servant of Christ is encouraged to bring forth plentifully the fruit of good works in the hope of being "plentifully rewarded;" so the penitent, in the hope of being more and more changed and forgiven.

At the same time, that we may not expect too much at once, we may see how the Holy Spirit teaches, that our cure can only be by degrees. To put away the evil of our doings from before God's eyes, we must not only "cease to do evil," but also "learn to do well:" and learning, we know, is a slow and laborious task. How much time does it take to become acquainted with a trade or a language, to frame one's hand to a particular sort of work, or one's tongue to a particular way of talking! especially when one is naturally ill-disposed that way, and used to something very different! Even so must people make up their minds to be feeble and awkward, and erring in the beginning of good practices. And though everything of this sort may well shame them inwardly and keep them humble before God, yet never let it make them despond, nor hinder them in courageously trying their very best, poor as it will be. By His gracious blessing, if they do but persevere, they will get spiritually stronger and do their work better, whether they know it themselves or no. The unclean or profane tongue will be more easily kept silent; the wandering heart will become more fixed in prayer; the slothful hand will more readily set about its work.

Even in those respects, in which one might think former sins would tie a person's hands, and hinder him from earnest and courageous amendment, the

Holy Spirit encourages men to go on, though humbly, yet courageously. When people have been going on wrongly themselves in any particular way, although they may have truly repented, yet sometimes the remembrance makes them cowardly, they are afraid and ashamed to check others, as they ought, in the same respects. Now the prophet, just after the text, instructs us that we ought not so to shrink, if we are in any way trusted with the care of any of our brethren. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well: seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." These offices, undertaking the cause of the helpless, judging and relieving those who suffer wrong, require a degree of boldness and of courage, which some may think hardly right in a sorrowful penitent. Yet you see, God requires these duties by His Prophet, at the hand of those whom He is just calling to repentance. Fathers and masters, and those who are in any way appointed to be guides over others, are not to give up their care, to be less exact and severe, because their conscience may perhaps tell them of past sins of their own, as bad or worse than any which they are called on to correct. Such miserable recollections are indeed a great reason why the person should humble himself inwardly, even in the act of trying to amend others; but they are no reason, why he should neglect the task of amending them. No! he must endure the remorse as part of his penance, but he must be all the more diligent in trying to save his brethren from it. And he has this great encouragement to do so, that there is an express promise of the Holy Ghost, "^a If any of you

^a S. James v. 19, 20.

do err from the truth and one convert him ; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” Not, of course that our doing good to others can save us from being cast away, if we go on wilfully in anything which God hates. But I suppose the Apostle to mean, that our gracious Father’s love for the souls of His erring children is so great, that if any one, otherwise truly penitent, is very anxious to do them good, God in His mercy bestows more grace on him, makes him more and more penitent, and prepares for him a more joyful absolution at the Last Day. And this is much to be borne in mind, when men are truly humbled with the bitter sense of their past transgressions ; their pain and grief, for the time, has a tendency to make them rather selfish ; their whole thoughts are turned inwardly on themselves, and they forget other persons, in their anxiety about their own state. At least, so it seems as if it would be, were we left to ourselves in our penitence. But the Lover and Redeemer of our souls has not left us to ourselves. Here He bids us, for our own pardon and purification’s sake, to go out of ourselves, and do other men’s souls all the good we possibly can. Our Lord Himself said to S. Peter, before that backsliding of his, “^b When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” And although the denial of S. Peter is not to be rashly compared with any wilful sin of a baptized person, yet surely what he was directed to do, they in humility may endeavour. If they have felt the Lord looking on them, and have trembled

^b S. Luke xxii. 32.

with shame, and withdrawn from their sins, and are weeping bitterly in heart at the remembrance of them, they may without presumption endeavour to strengthen their brethren, as God's good providence shall give them opportunity : if in no other way, yet surely in scrupulous watching, that they give no occasion of sin, either by doing what is amiss, or by leaving undone what ought to be done.

Another thing greatly to be considered is, that by charity, either to men's souls or bodies, you engage them to pray for you. And the prayer of the afflicted and poor people of Christ is not without a special power to draw down a blessing on those who have done them good for Christ's sake. A cup of cold water given in His Name shall in no wise lose its reward. The person receiving it will pray for the giver, and so his deeds of mercy will come up, as Cornelius's did before God. And when the special blessing he wants, is assistance from the Holy Spirit to repent more earnestly and hate his sins more heartily, and to have his Saviour's Blood applied, to the more entire washing out of them, there is very comfortable hope that it will be granted. True repentance, having really begun, will be greatly quickened by works of charity, such as will engage people to pray for us. Let those therefore, who have many sins to be forgiven, and who deeply fear lest those sins should have separated them from Jesus Christ, let them, by doing good for His sake, obtain the prayers of His poor afflicted people. As the woman did not grudge the precious ointment for our Saviour's feet, and, for such a sign of love, had the assurance that she was forgiven, so let the distressed conscience

be very busy in seeking out ways of waiting on the humblest and most forlorn of those who belong to Him. “^c With such sacrifices God is well pleased.” As they are in themselves acceptable, when sanctified by faith in Christ’s Blood, so they will cause many prayers to be made for us, such as He is likely to hear. If we try to be charitable with our penitence, there is so much the better hope of that penitence continuing.

And in other ways too, it is well that we should obtain all the help we can from the prayers of the Church, Christ’s Body, and of His true and faithful members. It is greatly recommended in those parts of Scripture, which treat of the remedies of sin among Christians; as by S. John, where he says, “^d If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall pray, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death:” and by S. James again: “^e Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Indeed this is one of the advantages of particular confession, as recommended in the Prayer Book, that it may secure for us the special intercession of God’s minister, and of others whom he may ask to pray for us, not mentioning our names to them. And, so far, secret penitents may have such a help as the public penitents had in old time, who were solemnly named in the intercessions of the Church. And God so loves to hear prayer, and has bound Himself by such grave promises to do so, that we must needs think it will be then surely heard, when it asks

^c Heb. xiii. 16.

^d 1 S. John v. 16.

^e S. James v. 16.

forgiveness and more penitence for some one who has begun to repent already.

Again, our Lord Himself has pointed out the hearty forgiveness of wrongs done to us, as one very special way of obtaining forgiveness of our own sins. As often as we pray, we are put in mind of this. “‘Forgive us our sins,” (so the Lord’s Prayer runs in S. Luke;) “for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” And He followed it up in the Sermon on the Mount by saying, “[§] If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:” i. e., it will be a help towards obtaining His forgiveness: it will be a token of true love to Him; and if your sorrow and repentance be quickened by true love, this is what in time will entirely cure your sin. O that all back-sliding Christians would consider this in earnest! that, as often as we see any one who has affronted or ill-used us, or spoken an ill word concerning us, and can shew him any kindness, little or great, so often God gives us a blessed opportunity of doing something towards the perfecting of our repentance, and the obtaining pardon for our own sins. We, in our foolish wicked ill-temper, are apt to shrink and draw back from such persons, even though we are not spiteful enough to take actual revenge on them. But if we were true friends to ourselves, we should rejoice in being friends with them, in overcoming every thought of personal dislike, in furthering their good works and rewards, and in judging kindly of all they say and do. For by practising this mind heartily before God, and not in shew for the praise of men, we shall be helping ourselves, as much as by any one

[†] S. Luke xi. 4.

[§] S. Matt. vi. 14.

thing we can do, to the obtaining of God's blessing on our repentance. As therefore we ought to be very thankful, when He sends chastisements upon us, knowing that if we endure afflictions, "^h He dealeth with us as with sons;" so should it be a real joy to us, when we are reproached and wronged; and the more so, the more grievous and painful and undeserved what we suffer. For we have at once an opportunity of following Christ, in overcoming our anger against those who so deal with us. We may use all gentleness towards them, as David to his enemies, both before and after his sad fall, and doubt not that so we shall find blessed helps, as he did (if we do not cast them away otherwise) towards true amendment and final forgiveness.

Now if penitent persons will really endeavour to order their practice in this way: if they will exercise themselves in doing courageously what is right and contrary to their former sins: if they will seek the prayers of good Christians, and of the Church by confession, and of Christ's afflicted or erring people by doing good to their souls or bodies: if they will be affectionate in giving and forgiving: then they may, with less danger of deceiving themselves, apply even the comfortable parts of Holy Scripture to their own case.

Not that we are at liberty to take the comfortable parts only. Rather, it becomes every penitent to urge himself to contemplate steadily that word of God, which condemns himself and his doings; to listen really to the Judge in the act of judging him, and meekly to acknowledge the full force of His words.

^h Heb. xii. 7.

But while we are thus filled with fear and godly sorrow, He would have us remember His merciful words too. But as long as we go on wilfully in any kind of disobedience, we had need be careful how we dwell on the merciful and encouraging texts, lest they tempt us to sin on. Let our repentance by His grace be well begun; and we shall find in every part of God's word that which will help us in it. Even the awful precepts and histories, those which touch people's own particular sins with the most startling and fearful truth, even they, as we read or hear and shrink under them, are, like God's chastisements, tokens that He has not cast us off, but is earnestly calling on us to have a better mind. So is the shame and pain, with which we read the histories of the holy Saints, Patriarchs or Martyrs, in the Old Testament or in the New, or in any of the records which God has preserved to us of them, who have wonderfully kept the commandments which we have shamefully broken. Though it breaks the heart, yet it is encouraging, because the very shame we feel is a token that God has not forsaken us.

Then, reflect for a moment, what a thing it is to have the use of the Psalms, especially the penitential Psalms. There the very sighs and tears, the words of shame and anguish and self-reproach which the penitent who loves God needed to express his feelings, are written for his use and learning so long before. And by whom written? By the pattern of penitents, David, under the guidance of that Holy Spirit, who knew beforehand all our sins and backslidings, knew that we should need those words, and commended them by His Church to the special use of such as we

are. As His giving us the Lord's Prayer, and so putting the word of prayer in our mouth, is a very gracious sign of His willingness to hear prayer: so surely His giving us the Psalms of penitence, such as that fifty-first Psalm especially, is a comfortable token of His willingness to forgive such as truly and earnestly repent. If we are really keeping ourselves from wilful sin, exercising forgiveness and charity, and yet doubt whether our past sins can be pardoned, let us devoutly turn to some one of those sacred Psalms. There is nothing likelier, by God's grace, to quiet and steady our amazed and bewildered spirits with a reasonable hope of pardon, and to leave on us only such a burthen of "i godly sorrow, as may work repentance unto salvation not to be repented of."

And what is more, we are permitted to read and hear the gracious declarations of Him Who "shall come to be our Judge." Jesus Christ Himself did and said many things, not indeed for the encouragement of those who are inclined to sin and repent and sin again, and who think His pardon may be lightly obtained, but for the stay and help of such as persevere, though feebly, alas! in penitence; that they might not despair, but draw nearer and nearer to Him, and learn to love Him more and more. Thus, among the blessings at the beginning of His awful sermon on the mount, He has this very gracious one: "Blessed are they that mourn:" i. e. (as a pious writer explains it) not the innocent tears of the righteous only, but the wholesome sadness also of penitents, shall be a source of true joy. And again where He says, "k I came not to call righteous persons, but sinners to repentance:" we may thankfully apply the saying

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

^k S. Matt. ix. 13.

even to such as have sinned grievously after Baptism, since we know that He trusted His Church with power to admit them to penitence. And again our Church in the Communion Service would have us make the same comfortable use of His invitation, “¹Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” And it is declared of Him that He “^mwill not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.” And “ⁿall manner of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven unto men, except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost:” though of course forgiveness is harder, in proportion as the sin increases in malignity. Then we may observe His whole manner to such as came to Him in true repentance: as to that woman in the Pharisee’s house, who, because she loved much, was not ashamed to humble herself openly before Him: to Zaccheus, when he showed himself truly repentant by confession and restoring fourfold: to the Publicans, when He told them of the lost sheep, of the prodigal son, and of him who smote upon his breast, saying “God be merciful to me a sinner!” It is true all these were as persons not yet baptized, coming to our Lord for the first time. Therefore we dare not, without great fear and trembling, apply what is said of them to our own wilful presumptuous sins. Yet, in all these and many instances more, He shews us such overflowing love, that we may humbly take them as grounds of hope for ourselves too: provided they make us more earnest in endeavouring to love Him, in grieving that we have offended Him, and in keeping all His commandments. If such be our minds, we may, for example, without presumption open our Bibles at that most

¹ S. Matt. xi. 28.^m Isa. xlii. 3.ⁿ S. Matt. xii. 31.

blessed parable of the prodigal son, and thank God on our knees for speaking to our hearts through it, and telling us that, although we have wilfully wandered from Him, though we have spent all, even to the very husks, yet, if we have truly risen up and left our sins, if we are really on our way to our Father's house, with hearts truly humbled and ready for the lowest place, He is, very likely, on His way to meet us, though we as yet feel it not: He has not cast us off, but is preparing some good thing for us, to be made known in His good time.

And what is above all, if we be thus truly penitent, endeavouring continually to be humbled in heart, yet in act cheerful and obedient, we may, with so much the more trembling hope, dwell on the saving Passion of our Lord, and use every part and circumstance of it as a token of His infinite love, not only to sinners in general, but to us also in particular. Then we may, to our great comfort, consider, that the Holy Lamb of God at the very moment of those His sufferings, knew of those very sins of ours, which now trouble us so much, and poured out His sacred Blood as "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction," for them, truly confessed and repented of. Then God gives us leave to beseech Him to look upon us, not as we are in ourselves, all sin and pollution, but as He caused us to be in Him, at Baptism, with the robe of His righteousness thrown over us. Then we may reasonably hope that His Blood will so blot out our stains, that we shall see Him and love Him for ever; that the Angels will rejoice over us, and our gracious Father will Himself say, This My son "was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

SERMON XLV.

THE REMEDIES FOR SIN AFTER BAPTISM. IV. CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION.

1 COR. xi. 31, 32.

“If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

IN speaking of the remedies for wilful sin, among Christians, we have not yet come to that which is the crown of all, the most blessed Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, whereby virtue goes out of Him to heal the souls of such as worthily approach Him, as, when He was in sight, it went out of His visible Body, to heal the bodies of such as touched Him in faith. No doubt that holy feast is the nearest approach to our Lord upon earth, and as a holy writer of our Church said, “the sovereign remedy of all sin-sick souls.” But the more blessed and divine a thing it is, the more reason, why it should not be put too early and too quickly forward, when people are but just beginning to repent. The more glorious and blissful the feast, the more care should be taken not to rush violently into it, without well brightening, as it were, our apparel.

And, besides, it should be considered, that forgiveness of sins is nowhere mentioned in Holy Scripture as the special grace of the Holy Communion. It is rather connected with Holy Baptism: as in the Creed, "I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins;" and S. Peter bids men "^arepent, and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." As persons must wash before they come to a feast, so the heavenly purity of innocency, which God gives in the Sacrament of Baptism, is the natural and sufficient preparation for the Holy Eucharist. If that have been unfortunately stained or injured, it is something else, not simply the Communion, which must restore it. The Communion is the seal and pledge of the remission of sins, otherwise obtained. His Blood is given in It, not for washing but for drinking.

We ought therefore to look well to it, that we be in a state of pardon, either by constant, hearty endeavours to live without wilful sin (which is sometimes called baptismal innocency,) or by true and earnest repentance after falling. I say, in one or other of these ways, every one should have his garments, the robes of his soul, washed and pure, before he venture to present himself at the Christian altar. Otherwise, we know what was said of him that had not on a wedding garment, "^bwhen the king came in to see the guests." "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness—there is weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Now it appears by the New Testament, that true and sufficient repentance after seriously falling, such

^a Acts ii. 38.

^b S. Matt. xxii. 13.

repentance as may qualify a person to come, not unworthily, to the Holy Communion, has special helps ordained for it, both in becoming heartily sorry, and in turning from our past sins for the future. There are "works meet for repentance" to be done: works, such as may help us to be lowly in heart, patient of rebuke, careless about the good things of the world.

One of these works, as I before said, is humble confession of our sins, not only before God, but in many cases also, before man. The Church of England specially recommends this, in cases of sick persons, "feeling their conscience troubled with any weighty matter:" and also, when any one preparing to come to the Communion, is "not able to quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel." In such cases the priest is especially appointed for us to open our griefs to. His lips are to preserve knowledge. He is to consider and tell us the true thoughts we should have of our sins, and the special safeguards and remedies, which the Almighty has provided for us. As the children of Israel, if any were smitten with a disease that seemed like leprosy, were to shew themselves to the priest, as also when they seemed to themselves cured, and it was the priest's office to declare them clean or unclean, to admit them or to shut them out from God's solemn service: so, in respect of this leprosy of wilful sin; since the priests of the kingdom of heaven are the stewards of the Sacraments, and they must not deliver them except to fit persons, it was no doubt, intended that penitents should make known to them their state of life, and whatever grievous crimes trouble them; and then, besides the general

form of Absolution which you find in the Communion service, such persons may have special Absolution too, provided "they humbly and heartily desire it," and shew forth worthy fruits of repentance. The priest, in Christ's Name and by His authority, may absolve them from the sin they have confessed, and so they may come to the Lord's table "with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience." For instance: you know our Lord said to His Apostles, "°Whose sins ye forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins ye retain, they are retained;" and S. Paul, being afterwards added to the twelve, had the same power in forgiving sins as they.

Now we read of a person at Corinth who fell into very grievous sin, and was accordingly excommunicated, turned out of the Church, by S. Paul. He did not deny his sin. He repented; he confessed it all and humbled himself; and so he was received into communion again, by direction of the Apostle, as before. He was restored, yet was no scandal given; because as his fault was well known, so also was his repentance. Whereas among us, when persons, after open sins, come to the Holy Communion, there is generally some doubt and perplexity, not to say offence, among the generality who notice it. But if it were known, that they had humbly confessed, and been absolved by the priest, so good a sign of true repentance and a dutiful mind would greatly help to do away the scandal and make their example edifying. And besides, how great a thing for such a person to know that he is coming in by the door, approaching Christ's Sacrament in the regular way,

not by any way of his own. It is a serious thing surely, for a notorious sinner to determine and judge for himself, whether his repentance is sufficient, and upon the strength of his own judgement, to come to that awful and holy feast, when he might have the judgement of Jesus Christ Himself by His commissioned minister. It is a great burthen, for such an one to absolve himself; and so, one must fear, it will be found at the last Day.

But perhaps your sins have been such, as men could not, or at least did not, take notice of; and you are ashamed to confess them to the priest, though in ever such general words. Yet what is this shame to what you bring upon yourself, should you unhappily make a mistake, and go with your sin upon you to the Holy Communion? The shame of your confession is but to one man, who is under a sort of oath to keep it secret. The shame of going with the grievous sin unforgiven, will overtake you in the presence of Jesus Christ, His Saints and Angels, and all men at the last Day. Now this I say, not as though it were so necessary to confess to one another, that one who neglects it, commits a sin; but because there are very many cases, in which it were better to confess; very many, I fear and believe, go down to their graves, far less penitent, and therefore less comfortable than they might be, for want of taking hold of this seasonable help which the Church so charitably offers them, by direction of Christ Himself. Many, I suppose, do not come to the Communion at all, because they cannot make up their minds to the present shame of such a confession; many, again, come, not unworthily, yet

with far less quiet consciences, and with more doubtful benefit, than they might. And what if some receive unworthily for want of confession? If they do so, going on impenitent in their sins, it is sad to think whose portion they put themselves in danger of. So far, they are like Judas Iscariot. Or should their fault be only passing irreverence, such as S. Paul reproved the Corinthians for, at least it is likely to bring on them some judgement in this world. All these evils would be avoided in many cases, if persons would have so much faith in Christ and His Church, as to seek forgiveness in the particular way He enjoined.

As to the painfulness of doing this, it is no objection at all, but rather one of the greatest reasons for our doing it: if, as I said, we will have but a little faith. For here we see, S. Paul expressly says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." That is, if we condemn and punish ourselves for our sins, it greatly helps our true repentance, and He will be the sooner ready to forgive them. Now, confession, so far as it gives pain, is a way of judging ourselves; and we feel that it must often be very painful. It is a token to ourselves and to the Church, that we are in earnest. It makes it so much the more unlikely, that we shall ever return to folly; and cast away, besides all God's mercy, what little we ourselves have so hardly and painfully won. Besides, we thus prevent God's judgement. We give Him glory, humbling ourselves under His just and strong hand: as Joshua said to Achan when he was taken in a secret fault, "^dMy son, give, I pray thee,

^d Josh. vii. 19.

glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him, and tell me now, what thou hast done; hide it not from me." Men are naturally more disposed to forgive those who humble and accuse themselves; and Almighty God, Who put this mind into us, has declared it to be His own mind too. He says to those guilty of grievous sin; "°Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He shall lift you up."

Thus, fasting too, and sackcloth, and other penitential observances, were accounted anciently of good use, to perfect repentance and obtain pardon. David, when his child was smitten for his wickedness, fasted, and kept himself in retirement, and lay all night upon the earth. Ahab "†rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly," that is, kept himself downcast and dejected, and he was spared for the time, though he fell away again. The King of Nineveh, when Jonah had preached to him, "§rose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes;" and fasted with his whole people very severely. In all these instances God favoured, more or less, those who so humbled themselves. And so, no doubt, He will now; if He see any of us so truly vexed at ourselves, so truly turning to Him, His mind is to spare such, as He spared that repenting thief, on his owning, "h We" suffer "justly, and receive the due reward of our deeds,

° S. James iv. 9, 10. † 1 Kgs xxi. 27. § Jonah iii. 6.

h S. Luke xxiii. 41.

but this Man hath done nothing amiss." Alms again and offerings, and giving up our substance for Christ's sake, has a blessing of the same kind. "ⁱ Break off thy sins," says the Prophet, "by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor." In every thing of this kind the principle of sacrifice is seen. More or less is yielded and given up, in token of our surrendering all in heart and mind. Whatever we do willingly in the way of real self-denial, though it cannot of itself change the heart, yet it may prevail with Almighty God to give us more of His grace for the changing of it; as His own afflictions do, if we bear them rightly. "^k When we are judged," says S. Paul, "the Lord is chastening us, that we should not be condemned with the world." His afflictions are a token of His gracious purpose towards us; they shew that He still accounts us His children. "^l For what son is he, whom the Father chasteneth not?" They make the spirit tender, break the bonds of many sins, quiet men's passions, and dispose their minds, they know not how themselves, to receive instruction. So the great penitent, and pattern of penitents, David, acknowledges in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm: "^m Before I was troubled, I went wrong; but now have I kept Thy word." If God's afflictions have so blessed an effect on men, we may hope that those, with which we visit ourselves, such as fasting, and other penitential exercises, may all be blessed in their measure, and may help us to lay hold in earnest of the Cross.

For that is, in short, the sum and substance of all

ⁱ Dan. iv. 27.

^l Heb. xii. 7.

^k 1 Cor. xi. 32.

^m Ps. cxix. 67.

penitency; whether we confess our sins, fast, give alms, afflict our souls, exercise bodily mortification, it is all well, so far as these are ways of truly laying hold of the Cross, clinging closer to it. That is what S. Paul called being made conformable to Christ's death. Far from abating our trust in His Blood, such penitential exercises drive us to Him as our only hope. For they make our spirits low and tender, apt to perceive, every day, more and more clearly, what a nothing it all is, which we have either done or can do. Job's saying was, when he had gone through his whole course of penitential affliction, "^a I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Such will their feeling ever be, who labour in earnest after true repentance; either patiently bearing what God sends, or quietly and steadily denying themselves. They will find more and more reason to be humble, more and more need thankfully to remember the only ransom that could save them. Christ will not stand in vain, knocking at the door of their hearts: they will hear His voice and open the door, and He will enter in and dwell there. They will have help to understand, more and more, that most awful and unspeakable thought of their being mysteriously united to Him in Baptism, so that their sins have been, in a peculiar manner sins against Him. Our bodies and souls are His members, so that, in our wilful abuse of them, (shocking thought) we profane and insult Him. This, when people come really to think of it, would be too dreadful to bear,

^a Job xlii. 5, 6.

were it not that, as we draw near Him in true penitence, He gives us leave to pray that we may have in our hearts, along with the sorrow, a deep sense of His love, a sweet hope of His final pardon. The thought of deadly sins, committed and impossible to be undone, of vile habits formed in the soul and not yet perfectly cured, such a thought going about with us wherever we walk, and whatever we do; this thought, and whatever else we do or suffer to humble ourselves for our sins, would bring us too low, were it not that He gives us leave to regard every such bitter thought, as a token that He is yet with us, that He has not cast us off, as we deserved: that we are in the furnace (may it so please Him) to be purged, not to be destroyed. While we are hard-hearted i. e. in wilful sin, our very joys and comforts, even what seem to us our spiritual comforts, are a snare to us. But, in true penitence, every sorrow, every distress and anguish of the heart, has in it a drop of comfort, which will by degrees make itself more and more tasted, as the love of God, and of our neighbour for His sake, is more and more shed abroad in the heart. We must not expect to *feel* this comfort always. Let us make up our minds to go on in faith, that there it is for us out of sight, to be had by and by when it shall please God, and in the mean time let us do our duty and bear our burthen as cheerfully as we can. It would be well, every morning of our lives, on our knees, humbly to recall our past sins, and beseech Him to forgive them for Christ's sake, and to help us to repent of them better: just as we every morning beg His blessing on the labours of the coming day; thus casting our burthen on our merciful Lord,

according to His gracious invitation, and taking His yoke upon us. Again, if we would make our penitence sure, let us also, every night of our lives, renew the same humble confession for all the great sins and habits of sin which we have ever fallen into. We should consider whether we have at all consented to any of those sins, in thought, word or deed, during the day past. If we have, so far our repentance is to begin again. And God, if we cry to Him in sincerity, will help us to make it more earnest than ever. We should not in any case despair or fall back, but fight manfully against the Evil one with prayer and self-denial, with watching of our senses and thoughts, denying ourselves worldly praise and pleasure, and especially putting down with shame and abhorrence any thought of valuing ourselves and thinking slightly of others.

By such confession, humiliation and watchfulness, even very grievous sinners may prepare themselves to receive the Communion worthily ; and they who might seem to us to need such preparation least, they best know how very desirable it is, how great a blessing goes along with it. When we have so come to Christ to be forgiven and cleansed, then may we without presumption come to Him to be fed also. The Absolution before the Communion worthily received, will give hope, and the holy Communion itself will join us nearer and nearer to our Lord. And so the returning prodigal, even in this world, may partake of the best things of his Father's house.

SERMON XLVI.

THE HOLY COMMUNION A PERPETUAL WITNESS OF THE LORD'S RETURN.

1 COR. xi. 26.

*“As often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup,
ye do shew the Lord's Death till He come.”*

IN this changeable and imperfect world of ours, some things are continually vanishing and decaying, while others continue regularly to go on, as they used to do from the beginning. Both the one and the other, both the changeable and the unchangeable, are to be regarded by us as tokens of the last Day. Each day, e.g. passes into the following night, and is gone for ever; and this is a sign and figure of all the days of the earth coming to an end: but then, by a fixed law, since the world was made, the sun has risen again in the morning, and a new day has begun; and here we have no less a sign and figure of that one Day known to the Lord, which will come after the end of the world; the Day which will never end, never give way to night and darkness. And so of many other

things, one after another they pass away; but the law and rule, which orders them, does not pass away; and both are intended by God Almighty to keep us in mind of the last great change.

The regular succession of day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, promised to Noah, is a token of the last Day, given to all the world: and another token of the same, given to the Church especially, is the constant succession of her Pastors, her Bishops and Priests; as our Lord Himself has promised: “^aI am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Whenever then we see a clergyman, one of the ministers of Jesus Christ, we see a true token from Him, that He will be here, by and by, to judge us. As God swore concerning the waters of Noah, that they should not return again to cover the earth, and interrupt the ordinary course of the seasons: so has He sworn, that that line or family of pastors to which He gave a beginning when He commissioned His Apostles, saying, “^bAs My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you;”— Christ hath sworn, that the order of true Bishops in His Church shall never entirely fail. He will be with them, even unto the end of the world. Therefore, as I said, the very sight of an ordained clergyman is a token from our Lord of the Day of Judgement: and so indeed are all other outward marks and memorials of the Church. The sight of a church-tower, the sound of the bells, the rest of the Sunday, our own Christian names, and a great many other things which might be mentioned, are so many tokens and pledges from God, that this world which we see is not all; that another world is

^a S. Matt. xxviii. 20.

^b S. John xx. 21.

soon to come after, and that, when it is come, it will last for ever.

But of all earthly signs and tokens, there is none, which seems so wonderfully ordained to prepare us for the last Day, and keep us in mind of it, as the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. Holy Scripture expressly connects the one with the other; the Communion with the Day of Judgement. For after S. Paul had put the Corinthians in mind of what he had always taught them concerning that Sacrament, how that our Lord ordained it, the same night in which He was betrayed, to be *done*, or sacrificed, in remembrance of Him after He was gone: lest they should imagine, that it was only the Apostles who had to perform this service, seeing that they alone were present with our Lord when He commanded it,—the Apostle goes on and declares, “For as often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death till He come.” As much as to say, that this mode of remembering our Lord's Death, and setting it forth before God and man, should never cease, while the world should stand. One generation after another will perish from the face of the earth; cities and empires will fade away; the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the prudent will be forgotten; customs, manners, languages may change, and the outward face of things be ever so different: but still this holy memorial of God made Man and crucified for us will go on being offered, and the holy Feast will go on to be received, from time to time, in all Churches of all lands, until that last morning break upon the earth, and the very

meaning and substance of that Sacrament, the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall appear openly in the eyes of men.

Here then is a point of rest and comfort, in even this present world, for true Christian faith to lay hold of and depend upon. Whatever else may deceive or fail us, whatever else may pass away, we can come here, if we be not wilfully unworthy, and find Christ, and in Him all that we can desire. Dear friends, on whom we had relied, may prove untrue; or they may be taken away from us; the Almighty may remove them into another world. But here is a Friend Who never will be wanting to us. When we are most lonely on earth, we are permitted to come and hold communion with Him. All things around us may seem sad and gloomy, and when we look on to the future, all may seem sad and gloomy before us: men may be in care for their children as well as for themselves: yet still in the thickest darkness, "^bthe Lord will be a light unto" them: the Lord Jesus, present according to His promise in this most holy Sacrament, will be more to them and their children, coming to Him worthily, in the way of comfort and relief, than all that this world, or the powers of darkness, can bring upon them in the way of desolation and distress. And this in all times, and wheresoever the Church remains. Whatever befalls her, she will shew the Lord's Death till He come, in the eating of that Bread and drinking of that Cup: and the Lord, so abiding in her, will be a light and a salvation to all who sincerely seek Him.

Most comfortable therefore to all good Christians

^b Micah vii. 8.

is the assurance of the Holy Eucharist abiding to the end; more especially in times of doubt, perplexity and anguish. But it is likewise a most awful and alarming thought. If the holy Communion is indeed God's ordained way of proclaiming the Lord's Death till He come, then is it a most sure sign of the Day of Judgement constantly approaching nearer: it is one of those many terrible sights and sounds which we know by our Lord's warnings will go before His second coming from Heaven. In this sense the old Christians seem to have understood those sayings of our Saviour, "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left." That is, persons who seem outwardly to be going on just alike, will in that day be suddenly parted for ever by the just judgement of Almighty God. But now mark what follows. When the disciples heard this, "^dthey answered and said unto Him, Where, Lord? And He said unto them, Wheresoever the Body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." As if He should say, you are wondering what kind of transaction this should be, wherein so deep and fearful a separation shall be made between God's true and false servants. I will tell you. It will be in the holy Communion, where will be that sacred carcase, or body, the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which the eagles, that is to say, all souls that fly towards heaven and are preparing to see God, will in all times and places assemble. Good and sincere Christians will be there, and likewise bad and hypocritical

^c S. Luke xvii. 34.^d Ib. 37.

Christians. Both will come to the holy Sacrament, but their different receiving will in God's sight put a fearful mark of difference upon them : a mark which God and His angels will see all along, but which will not be made evident to men, until that Day wherein Christ's Glorious Body, hidden in the Sacrament, will "appear from Heaven."

Think, my brethren, according to this account of the meaning of Christ's words, what an unspeakably dreadful place is the holy altar of God, as well as being a place of most unutterable blessing. It is, in figure and under a veil, the very judgement-seat of Christ. For He is there with unerring eye, marking who and what they are, who come so near to Him : whether they have the wedding garment or no : whether, professing, as they do all alike, to be of His flock, they belong for the time to the sheep, or rather to the goats. Consider that, when you come into this house and turn your eyes this way, and see this altar table spread with its fair linen cloth, it is no ordinary sight, which you see. Among other great things, it is a sure token, to the very eye, of the near approaching day of our Lord's second Coming. The altar so prepared seems, as it were, to cry out and say to you, "Here is that Body and Blood which is the life of the world : come to It, that you may have life; that you may be strengthened and purified to behold It, when It shall openly shew itself in the skies." The altar covered is a token of Christ's Presence; and if we had full faith, it would be to us, as the things which will come to pass, immediately before the last Day, will be to all good Christians.

In another way too the holy Sacrament is a sign

to us of the last Day : that it is the ordained way of preparing ourselves for it, “^e Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” God has mercifully provided for us this way of approaching our Lord, and becoming, if one may say so, accustomed to His divine Presence, so that when it is revealed, we may be able to bear it. And the preparation too for worthy Communion is just the same as the preparation for death and judgement. S. Paul uses the very word. “^f Judge yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord.” Examine, try, search yourselves thoroughly ; accuse and condemn yourselves without sparing for your own faults, that you may not be accused and condemned in that fearful judgement. There is no better way to get ready for this holy Sacrament, than for each person to imagine within himself that he is kneeling before Christ, Christ sitting on the judgement seat, and looking down into his heart. With the thought of that severe All-seeing eye strong upon us, there is hope that we may not deceive ourselves, nor pass over things too easily. That fearful Presence may be as a fire, burning out what is amiss in us, and helping us to purge our hearts by true contrition and confession and amendment. There will be no self-excusing, no hypocrisy, when the Judgement is finally set, and the books are opened. Stedfastly fix your heart upon that day, when you are endeavouring to get ready for the blessed Communion, and you will be clear of self-deceiving and hypocrisy now.

Thus you see that feeding on our Lord sacramentally

^e S. John vi. 54.

^f 1 Cor. xi. 13.

is the ordained preparation for seeing His face with joy, and being raised up by Him, when He shall come openly in the clouds. You see also, that the self-examination and purification of heart, which is needed for this holy Sacrament, is also the very rehearsal of what we must do, that we may not be, like the foolish virgins, caught suddenly with our lamp gone out, when the Bridegroom shall return at midnight. But now, my brethren, if all this be so, what shall we say to those many, who regularly neglect and turn away from the holy Communion? What shall we say to them, as concerning their preparation to meet our Lord? I fear, they are too much like those sick persons, who know they have a bad complaint, and know what their physician tells them is the only remedy for it, and yet, for some reason or other, refuse or neglect to take that remedy. How can such patients ever expect to recover? And how can sinful men ever expect to be able to stand before Christ at His coming, if they live on, neglecting that Bread from heaven, which alone can give them strength to do so? Again, imagine, if you can, the horror and confusion of the poor soul, taken unawares by the summons to hasten before her Judge, and to remember and confess all her sins, when she has never been used, as thoughtful communicants are, to search and examine and try herself. Think of the burthen of all the sins of a man's life, heaped and crowded into that one dreadful moment: no time to repent, no time to lighten himself of it in the least degree. All this misery, and all the sad Eternity which will follow after, he might have avoided, had he only taken the many warnings

of the Church, to examine and prepare himself, and be a constant, and worthy communicant.

Again, the holy Communion is a preparation for the Day of Judgement in this other way also: that our Lord said expressly to His Apostles, and through them to all His people, "This do in remembrance of Me." And how shall we be able without confusion to meet His Countenance turned on us in the last Day, if we have knowingly despised this remembrance of Him, so especially recommended to us, one may say, by His dying breath? We know there are old stories, true or false, of spirits from the dead, sometimes appearing to people, and rebuking them sharply for neglecting some command, which they had earnestly enjoined on them before they died: and though we may not believe the story, we feel how terrible such a visitation would be. But what are all such imaginations put together, compared with this *certainty*: that our Lord will come one day, and ask His careless indevout servants, "Why did you scorn My dying command? I was on the point of laying down My life for you, and I gave you one special token, no hard nor painful one, to remember Me by: and you knew it: you were told of it over and over: yet you went on, as if I had never said anything of it." What if our gracious but offended Master should then go on and say, "As you would not remember Me, neither will I remember you? You behaved as if My death were nothing to you: and it *shall* be nothing to you: except, alas! that, being despised, it will prove to your greater condemnation?" I say, if the scorers of the holy Communion should by and by hear such

words as these spoken to them, which of them will be able to say he did not deserve it? Which of them but must own that he had abundance of warning?

Little good will it do in that hour for a man who knew his Lord's command, and fulfilled it not, to say; "I was irresolute, I sometimes thought of coming, and half made up my mind, and how it went off again I scarcely know:" or again, "I was ashamed: I knew that up and down that street all the people would point at me and notice me for coming:" such reasons as these may pass off with our foolish weak hearts now, but they will not satisfy us when we meet our God. Still less will it avail to say; "I wished to come, but I was attached to some wicked disorderly way, and I had not the heart to break myself of it:" or again, "I did not come, because I could not believe that the virtue of the Sacrament was so great." For all such sayings only increase the sin.

My brethren, consider well what your behaviour should be with regard to it. Every time you see this table spread, it is a warning to you of Christ's second Coming, and an instruction to you how to prepare for it. Every time you turn away in carelessness or impenitence, you are making light of that day. Should you ever come wilfully unprepared, you are sinning, with that day in a manner before your eyes. Oh come then, but take care to come worthily. Else what will you do, when the Lord shall visit you? How will the scorner endure it, when he hears, "None of those men which were bidden shall taste of My supper?" How, the profane and wilfully

unworthy communicant, when it shall be said to him, “^hI never knew you : depart from Me, ye that work iniquity ?” And think also, on the other hand, of that especial and most loving welcome, with which He has promised to greet in heaven all such as penitently and humbly partake of Him on earth : “ⁱBlessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh, shall find watching : Verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and shall come forth and serve them.”

^h S. Matt. vii. 23.

ⁱ S. Luke xii. 37.

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when Thou comest
in Thy kingdom.

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